MJI LALL

JOHN DONNE

AN EVALUATION OF HIS POETRY

SURJEET BOOK DEPOT
DELHI

য়া সংগঠনের নির্দেশেই প্রত্যক্ষ রাজনীতিতে
রাজ্য যুব মোর্চার সহসভাপতি, দুই দফায় রাজ্য বিজেপির
াদিকার দায়িত্ব পালনের পরে রাজ্যের সাধারণ সম্পাদিকা। প্রথম থেকে কুশলী

JOHN DONNE

(An Evaluation of His Poetry)

By

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PREFACE

John Donne is one of the more difficult of English poets. This book is an attempt to throw some light on the most important of his poems so as to enable the student not only to understand but appreciate them because there is, indeed, much to admire and enjoy in Donne's work. The subtlety and obscurity of his poetry discourage us no doubt, but the labour we spend on him is highly rewarding.

The book has been divided into three parts—(1) John Donne, the Man and His Poetry, (2) Detailed Consideration of Selected Poems (the text of which has been provided for ready reference), (3) Important Questions with Answers.

The book is designed to meet the requirements of advanced university students for whom Donne may have been prescribed for exhaustive study. The old spelling in the text of Donne's poems has been retained, but modernized spelling has been used in quotations, etc.

Finally, I must say what I have said about each of my previous books : "No originality is claimed for this work. It is not a research paper. The object was to select and co-ordinate critical material and to present it, with suitable illustrations from the next, in an easily intelligible and assimilable form."

RAMJI LALL

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PART ONE

John Donne : The Man and His Poetry

1

John Donne— A Short Biographical Sketch

Family-background. John Donne was born some time in the first half of 1572 in the City of London. His father was a prosperous merchant of Welsh ancestry, who rose to be warden of the Ironmongers' Company in 1574. Two years later he died. Donne's mother was Elizabeth Heywood, daughter of John Heywood, epigrammatist and playwright. The family had a strong Roman Catholic tradition. Donne's mother's brothers, Ellis Heywood and Jasper, were both Jesuits who died in exile. His younger brother, Henry, died at the age of nineteen in 1593, having caught fever in the prison to which he had been committed for providing shelter to a priest.

Education and early poems. In 1584, Donne matriculated at Hart Hall, Oxford. As it was impossible for a Roman Catholic to take the oath of supremacy required at graduation, he left without taking a degree. According to Izaac Walton*, Donne went to Cambridge on leaving Oxford. He entered as a law student at Thavies Inn, London, in 1591 and moved to Lincoln's Inn in 1592. He read voraciously and lived gaily. He was described as a great visitor of ladies, a great frequenter of plays, and a great writer of conceited verses. Most probably he travelled extensively during the period between leaving Oxford and entering the Inns of Court. According to one account, about the nineteenth year of his age he, being unresolved what religion to adhere to, put aside other studies in order to survey and consider the body of divinity. But the dandy and wit, and the serious student, are both reflected in the poems Donne wrote at this time. His poems, though not published until

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***Izaac Walton was Donne's first biographer.**

after his death, were circulated in manuscript, and like Wyatt's and Surrey's, had an immense influence on younger poets. Part of this poetry is in such classical forms as satires, elegies, and epistles (though its style has anything but classical smoothness), and part is written in lyrical forms of extraordinary variety.

Expeditions to Cadiz and the Azores. In 1596, Donne went on the Earl of Essex's Cadiz expedition, an enterprise that ranked for daring with the repulse of the Armada. In 1597, he went on the voyage to the Azores. *The Storm* and *The Calm*, brilliant examples of poetical journalism, describe this second expedition. On his return he became Secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper. He had, by this time, conformed to the Church of England (In other words, he had given up his Catholic faith).

Marriage and its consequences. In 1601, he fell passionately and seriously in love with Ann More, the young niece of the Lord Keeper and, by his secret marriage to her, ruined his chances of a promising diplomatic career. He was imprisoned for the offence of marrying a minor without her guardian's consent, and the girl's father, Sir George More, secured his dismissal from Egerton. On his release, he found himself without employment and his wife without a dowry. For fourteen years after that he ate the bitter bread of dependence. He had spent his patrimony as a young man about town and the following years were years of poverty and humiliation. His marriage proved to be the great error of his life from the worldly point of view. In his mood of despair he yet wrote wittily to his wife : "John Donne, Ann Donne, Un-done."* At the beginning of his married life, Donne was lucky to be offered board and lodging at Pyrford by his wife's cousin Sir Francis Wooley. In this quiet Surrey village, he spent three years of retirement increasing his knowledge, reading widely (chiefly in theology), away from the storms and glare of London, where during this time the great Elizabeth Age came slowly to its close. Between 1590 and 1602 Donne must have written many of the secular poems we now admire. Residence with Wooley lasted from 1602 to 1604. After the death of Wooley, the Donnes took a house at Mitcham (also in Surrey), until such time (1609) as Sir Robert Drury took them under his protection.

Writings in verse and prose. The finest of Donne's poems, the *Songs and Sonets*, cannot be dated with any certainty. But some were certainly written after his marriage, since they assume a king upon the throne. The more serious and impassioned of them centre, in all probability, round Ann More. The more cynical and outrageous of these poems belong perhaps to the Lincoln's Inn period. To the same period belong the *Elegies*, and the *Paradoxes and Problems* (in prose). These last, however, are a warning of the uncertainty of such a conjecture, since Donne was capable of amusing himself with this kind of witty trifling as late as 1607. Donne did not write for publication. He wrote to please himself and his friends. Original as the *Songs and Sonets* are, many are brilliant variations on stock themes. The impulse behind any one of them may have been an artistic pleasure in making something new out of an old topic rather than a wish to express personal feeling. According to another view, however, most of these poems convey personal experiences of the author.

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*The name "Donne" is pronounced in the same way as the word "done" So the line quoted here is an example of punning.

The end of financial worries. From 1602 to 1615 Donne struggled to find ways to support himself and his growing family. His wife bore him twelve children, seven of whom survived her. She died a premature death in 1617. At first he depended on charity, but after a few years he found a use for his extensive learning in helping Thomas Morton in his controversies with Roman Catholics. As early as 1607 Morton had urged Donne to take orders, but Donne had refused on grounds of personal unworthiness. Donne was probably also reluctant to give up all hope of a secular career. Sir George More at last relented over the dowry, and Donne found himself free from serious financial worry.

Friendships with Mrs. Herbert and the Countess of Bedford. Donne had a gift for friendship, and knew well many of the people who mattered most outside the narrow and exalted circle of the court itself. Among his friendships at this time it is pleasant and important to note one in particular : his association with the Herbert family, and especially with Magdalen Herbert, a remarkable woman and most virtuous. Donne wrote for this woman the lovely elegy *The Autumnal* where, he says, "affection takes reverence's name." *The Autumnal* is a characteristic metaphysical poem of Donne's middle period, thoroughly secular in style. An even greater lady among Donne's friends at this time was his patroness Lucy, Countess of Bedford who lived at Twickenham and to whom Donne addressed some of his *Verse Letters*. Through her he came into contact with influential persons.

Two prose works. His first published work, *Pseudo-Martyr* (in prose), written to persuade Roman Catholics to take the oath of allegiance, appeared in 1610. It earned him an honorary degree of M.A. at Oxford and also brought him to the notice of the King. This weighty work was followed by *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), a brilliant and bitter little squib against the Jesuits.

His ordination. In 1610, Donne found a new patron in Sir Robert Drury who took him abroad from November, 1611 to August, 1612. On his return he courted the King's powerful favourite, Viscount Rochester. He wrote to Rochester expressing an intention to take orders. But a later letter to a friend, asking him to use his influence with Rochester to secure a diplomatic post, shows him wavering. There is no doubt of Donne's reluctance to take orders. But he finally gave way in obedience to King James's direct pressure. He was ordained on the 23rd January, 1615 and at the age of forty-three began a new life as a priest. Shortly after his ordination Donne was, by royal command, made a Doctor of Divinity at Cambridge, and his fame as a preacher spread so rapidly that he was offered benefices in many parts of the country. He refused them all, for he did not wish to leave London. When in 1617 his wife died, leaving him with seven children to bring up, he withdrew from the world and became a solitary. "In this retiredness", wrote Izaak Walton, "which was often from the sight of his dearest friends, he beame *crucified to the world*, and all those vanities, those imaginary pleasures, that are daily acted on that restless stage : and they were perfectly crucified to him"

Poetic works of his middle years. During these middle years Donne wrote two poems for publication, the *Anniversaries* of 1611 and 1612, in commemoration of the death of Elizabeth Drury, the 15-year-old daughter of his patron. He also composed funeral pieces, complimentary epistles, and two epithalamions : one for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth, and the other for the wedding of Somerest and the Countess of Essex. Most of his "Divine Poems" belong to this period also, notably *A Litany* and two sets of sonnets : *La Corona*, a linked sequence on the mysteries of the Christian religion, and the *Holy Sonnets*, in which with intense feeling and great force of language he treats the age-old themes of meditation : sin, death, and judgment. After his ordination Donne wrote very little poetry. His creative impulse found a new outlet in preaching.

As a churchman. Donne felt a deep satisfaction in the exercise of his functions as a churchman, and was conscientious in performing his duties. Like all distinguished churchmen of his day, he was a pluralist, holding country livings as a non-resident and the city living of St. Dunstan-in-the-West. In 1616, he was appointed Reader in Divinity to the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn. In 1619, he went abroad as chaplain to Viscount Doncaster on a mission to the German princes in an effort to avert the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War. In 1621, he became Dean of St. Paul's. There was a proposal in 1630 to make him a bishop, but he was by then a very sick man. He died in London on the 31st March, 1631, and was buried in St. Paul's, where his monument still stands.

A great preacher. Donne received many tributes to his impressiveness in the pulpit. He was a favourite preacher at court, and much approved by that learned theologian, King James. James's more devout, if less learned, son, Charles I, chose Donne to preach the first sermon of his reign. But Donne's finest sermons were preached in St. Paul's on the great feasts. They are splendid examples of the formal sermon, preached under heads given by the dividing of the text and buttressed with massive scriptural and patristic quotations, full of flashes of poetic imagination. They also display a profound knowledge of the human heart and a firm grasp on the central doctrines of Christianity. A few sermons were printed in his life-time. His only other publication after his ordination was *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), the fruit of a serious illness in the winter of 1623. During this illness, Donne wrote the "Hymn to God the Father", and "Hymn to God in My Sickness", although, according to another version, he wrote this last poem on his death-bed.

The last sermon : The monument. Donne was too ill to preach at Christmas 1630, but he was able to preach before the King on the 12th February, 1631. His appearance, as an obviously dying man, made a deep impression and many said that Dr. Donne had preached his own funeral sermon. This last sermon, under the title "Death's Duel", was published shortly after his death. Between preaching this sermon and his death, Donne had his picture painted in his shroud and composed his epitaph. The picture was the original of the engraved portrait prefixed to "Death's Duel", and from it Nicholas Stone carved the monument in St. Paul's, where Donne stands in his shroud upon an urn.

Posthumous publications. Eighty sermons, which Donne had written out in full as a legacy to his son, were published by the latter in 1640, with the first version of Walton's *Life of Donne* prefixed. A further fifty sermons appeared in 1649. The younger Donne also published *Essays in Divinity* and *Letters to Several Persons Of Honour* in 1651. The *Poems*, which had circulated widely in manuscript copies, appeared in 1633, and an enlarged edition in 1635. It is not known who was responsible for these editions. There were further editions in 1639, 1649, 1650, 1654, and 1669. Between the last of these and the appearance of Donne in John Bell's *Poets of Great Britain* (1779), there is only Jacob Tonson's edition of 1719.

Biographies by Izaac Walton and Edmund Gosse. Walton revised his *Life of Donne* (1640) in 1658 and again in 1670 and 1675. His declared purpose, to show the world "the best plain picture of the author's life which my artless pencil, guided by the hand of truth, could present", does not indicate the degree to which he was prompted by the desire to present his hero in the most edifying light. Sir Edmund Gosse's *Life and Letters of John Donne* (1899) remains the only full biography, but it is extremely unreliable. All students of Donne have to be on their guard against Walton's gift for charming and probable anecdote, and Gosse's habitual inaccuracy and constitutional inability to distinguish between fact and conjecture.

The essential truth about Donne lies in these words of Izaak Walton. "He was by nature highly passionate, but more apt to reluct all the excesses of it. A great lover of the offices of humanity, and of so merciful a spirit, that he never beheld the miseries of mankind without pity and relief".

2

Principal Poetic Works of John Donne

I. "**Songs and Sonets***" : a collection of fifty-five poems on the subject of love. Some of the best-known of these poems are :

1. *The Good-Morrow*
2. *Song* : "Go and catch a falling star"
3. *The Sun Rising*
4. *The Canonization*
5. *The Anniversary*
6. *Twickenham Garden*
7. *Love's Alchemy*
8. *The Flea*
9. *A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day*
10. *A Valedicton : Forbidding Mourning*
11. *The Ecstasy*
12. *The Blossom*
13. *The Relic.*

II. **Elegies** : a group of twenty poems, also on the subject of love. (Properly speaking an elegy means a mournful poem, or a poem about death. But here the word is used in a different sense). The Roman poet, Ovid, seems to have been Donne's model for the writing of these poems. Here are the titles of some of the Elegies :

1. *Jealousy*
2. *The Anagram*
3. *Change*
4. *The Perfume*
5. *His Picture*
6. *On His Mistress*
7. *Variety*

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* This word is also spelt as "sonnets" by many critics, even though none of the poems in this collection is a sonnet in the proper sense of the word. "Sonet" means a poem that can be set to music.

8. *Love's Progress*
9. *To His Mistress Going to Bed*
10. *Love's War*

(*To His Mistress Going to Bed* is perhaps the most delectable of these).

III. "**Heroical Epistle**" : Sapho to Philaenis.

IV. Epithalamions : Songs celebrating the marriage of certain important personages.

V. Satires : a group of five satirical poems in couplets—

1. Away thou fondling motley humorist
2. Sir ; though (I thank God for it)
3. Kind pity chokes my spleen
4. Well ; I may now receive, and die
5. Thou shalt not laugh in this leaf.

VI. Verse Letters. Letters in verse addressed to a number of patrons and friends like Christopher Brooke, the Countess of Huntington, the Countess of Bedford, Mrs. Magdalen Herbert, Sir Henry Wotton, Sir Henry Goodyer, and others.

VII. "The Progress of the Soul : Infinitati Sacrum."

VIII. "An Anatomy of the World" (or, the First Anniversary).

IX. "The Progress of the Soul" (or, the Second Anniversary).

(These two poems—VIII and IX—were written to commemorate Miss Elizabeth Drury who had died at the age of fifteen).

X. Divine Poems

XI. Holy Sonnets : nineteen in number, these sonnets have a religious character like the Divine Poems.

XII. Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward

XIII. Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness

XIV. A Hymn to God the Father.

3

Donne's Poetry— A Brief Critical Survey

Satires. Donne wrote five verse-satires : (*i*) "Away thou fondling motley humorist ; (*ii*) "Sir ; though (I thank God for it)" ; (*iii*) Kind pity chokes my spleen" ; (*iv*) "Well ; I may now receive, and die" and (*v*) "Thou shalt not laugh in this leaf". Two other satires originally attributed to Donne are now believed to be the work of others.

Donne's satires have features in common with the other imitations of Juvenal, Persius, and Horace which were produced in the last decade of the sixteenth century, especially a heightened emphasis of style and a corresponding vehemence and harshness of versification. But, in verse and style and thought, Donne's satires are superior to either Hall's "dashing, smirking, fluent imitations of the ancients" or Marston's tedious and tumid absurdities. The verse of these poets is much less irregular than Donne's. It approximates more closely to the balanced couplet movement of Drayton's *Heroical Epistles*. Hall's couplets are neat and pointed, Marston's more irregular and *enjambed*. But Donne's satiric verse shows something like a consistent effort to eschew a couplet structure, and to give to his verse the freedom and swiftness of movement to which, when he wrote, even dramatic blank verse had hardly yet attained. He uses all the devices—the main pause in the middle of the line, weak and light endings (he even divides one word between two lines)—by which Shakespeare secured the abrupt, rapid effects of the verse of ***Macbeth*** and the later plays :

> Gracchus loves all (*i.e.* religions) as one, and thinks that so
> As women do in divers countries go
> In divers habits, yet are still one kind,
> So doth, so is Religion ; and this blind-
> ness too much light breeds ; but unmoved thou
> Of force must one, and forced but one allow ;......
>
> Satire III

Such verse is certainly not smooth or melodious. Yet the effect is deliberate and quite appropriate to the theme and the spirit of the poem. Donne had certainly classical models in view—Martial, Persius, Horace. But imitation alone will not account for Donne's peculiarites. If there is one thing more distinctive than another of Donne's best work, it is the closeness with which the verse echoes the sense and soul of the poem. And so it is in the satires. Their abrupt harsh verse reflects the spirit in which they were written. Horace, quite as much as Persius, is Donne's teacher in satire ; and it is Horace he believes himself to be following in adopting a verse in harmony with the unpoetic temper of his verse :

> And this unpolish'd rugged verse I chose,
> As fittest for discourse and nearest prose.

The style of Donne's satires has neither the intentional obscurity of Hall's more ambitions imitations of Juvenal, nor the vague bluster of Marston's onslaughts upon vice. Donne's wit is a succession of disconcerting surprises. His thought is original and profound. His expression, though condensed and harsh, is always precise. His out-of-the-way learning, too, which supplies puzzles for modern readers, is used with a pedantic precision, even when fantastically applied.

In substance, Donne's satires are not only wittier than those of his contemporaries but weightier in their serious criticism of life, and happier in their portrayal of manners and types. In this respect, some of them are an interesting pendant to Jonson's comedies. *Satire I* describes a walk through London with a giddy ape of fashion, who is sketched with a lightness and vivacity wanting to Jonson's more laboured studies of Fastidious Brisk[*] and his fellows. *Satire II*, opening with a skit on the lawyer turned poet, passes into a sharp onslaught upon the greedy and unprincipled exacter of fines from recusant[†] catholics, and "purchaser" of men's lands :

> Shortly (as the sea) he'll compass all the land ;
> From Scots to Wight ; from Mount to Dover strand.

He is the lineal descendant of Chaucer's Man of Law, to whom all was fee-simple in effect, drawn in more angry colours. *Satire III* stands by itself, being a grave and eloquent plea for the serious pursuit of religious truth, as opposed to capricious or indolent acquiescence, on the one hand, and contemptuous indifference on the other.

These three satires were most probably written in 1593, and they seem to reflect the mind of Donne during his early years in London, at the inns of court, when he was familiar with the life of the town, and in a state of intellectual detachment as regards religion, with a lingering prejudice in favour of the faith of his fathers.

The last two satires were written in 1597, or the years immediately following, when Donne was in the service of the Lord Keeper, and they bear the mark of the budding statesman. The first is a long and somewhat over-elaborated satire on the fashions and follies of court-life at the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign. The picture of the bore was doubtless suggested by Horace's *Ibam forte via sacra*, but, like all Donne's types, was drawn from the life, and with the same amplification of detail and satiric point which are to be found in

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[*] **Brisk is the name of a fantastic fop in Ben Jonson's comedy *Every Man out of his Humour*.**

[†] ***recusant*—person who refused to attend Church-of-England services.**

Pope's renderings from Horace. The last of Donne's satires (Satire V) deals with the familiar theme of Spenser's laments—the miseries of suitors.

Donne's satires were very popular. They seem to have circulated more freely than the songs and elegies which were confined to the circle of the poet's private friends. But the fact remains that the *Songs and Sonets* and the *Elegies* contain the most vivid and intimate record of Donne's inner soul in these ardent years, as the religious sonnets and hymns do of his later life. And the influence of these on English poetry was deeper and, despite the temporary eclipse of metaphysical poetry, more enduring, than that of his pungent satires or of his witty but often laboured and extravagant eulogies in verse letters and funeral elegies.

Songs and Sonets, and **Elegies**. Of these poems, not one is a sonnet in the regular sense of the word. Neither in form nor in spirit was Donne a Petrarchan poet. Some were written to previously existing tunes ; all probably, with a more or less definitely musical intention. The poems under these heads ("Songs and Sonets" and "Elegies") show Donne as one of the greatest of English poets of love.

The three strains in Donne's love-poetry. It is possible to distinguish three strains in Donne's love-poetry (including both the powerful and enigmatical elegies and the strange and fascinating songs). One of these strains prevails in most of the elegies and in the larger number of the lyrical pieces, in songs like *Go and Catch a Falling Star*, *Send home my long stray'd eyes to me*, or such lyrics as *Woman's Constancy*, *The Indifferent*, *Air and Angels*, *The Dream*, and *The Apparition*. This is the most distinctive strain in his early poetry, and it is the strain which shows most strikingly the contrast between his love-poetry and the love-poetry of his contemporaries, the sonneteers. There is no echo of Petrarch's woes in Donne's songs and elegies which are passionate and insolent, rapturous and angry. The love which he portrays is not the impassioned yet intellectual idealism of Dante. It is not the refined and adoring sentiment of Petrarch. It is not the Epicurean but courtly love of Ronsard*. Nor is it the passionate,. chivalrous gallantry of Sidney. It is the love of the Latin lyricists and elegiasts, a feeling which is half rapture and half rage, for one who is never conceived of as standing to the poet in the ideal relationship of Beatrice to Dante or of Laura to Petrarch. Donne's sentiment in these poems is more or less as follows :

> Hope not for mind in women ; at their best
> Sweetness and wit, thy're but Mummy possest†.

But if Donne's sentiment is derived rather from Latin than from Italian and courtly poetry, it was reinforced by his experience, and it is expressed with a wit and erudition that are all his own. And, in reading some of the elegies and the songs, we must not forget to make full allowance for his inexhaustible and astounding wit and fancy. "I did best", he said later, "when I had least truth for my subject". Realistic his love-poetry may be ; but it is not safe to accept it as a history of his experiences. The *Elegies* are the fullest record of Donne's more cynical frame of mind and the conflicting moods which it gave rise to. Some, and not the least brilliant in wit and execution, are frankly sensual. Others are fiercely, almost brutally, cynical and satirical. Still others, like *The Chain* and *The Perfume*, are more simply witty. A few, like *The Picture*, strike a purer note.

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*Ronsard : French lyric poet (1524—1585). He exercised considerable influence on the English sonnet-writers of the 16th century, and on Spenser.

†*A Love's Alchemy*.

A strain of impassioned paradox runs through them ; they are charged with wit ; the verse, though harsh at times, has more of the couplet cadence than the satires ; the phrasing is full of startling felicities :

> I taught my silks their rustlings to forbear,
> Even my oppress'd shoes dumb and silent were.

And there are not wanting passages of pure and beautiful poetry :

> I will not look upon the quickening sun
> But straight her beauty to my sense shall run ;
> The air shall note her soft, the fire most pure,
> Waters suggest her clear, and the earth sure.

This turbid, passionate yet cynical, vein is not the only one in Donne's love-poetry. Two others are also to be found in some of his finest lyrics. One of these two shows Donne returning a little towards the sonneteers, especially the more Platonising among them. Poems like *Twickenham Garden*, *The Funeral*, *The Blossom*, and *The Primrose*, were probably addressed neither to the mistresses of his youth, nor to the wife of his later years, but to the high-born lady friends, Mrs. Herbert and the Countess of Bedford, for whom he composed the ingenious and learned compliments of his verse-letters. Towards them, he adopts the hopeless and adoring posture of Petrarchan flirtation and, in high Platonic vein, boasts that,

> Difference of sex no more we knew
> Than our guardian angels do ;
> Coming and going we
> Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals ;
> Our hands ne'er touched the seals
> Which nature, injured by late law, sets free ;
> These miracles we did ; but now alas ;
> All measure and all language I should pass,
> Should I tell you what a miracle she was. (*The Relic*)

The third strain in Donne's love-poetry is less artificial than the one just dealt with, but purer than the one mentioned earlier. This third strain is simpler, though not less intense, than the other two. It is the feeling of those lyrics which, in all probability, were addressed to his wife. This strain is represented by the exquisite song :

> Sweetest love, I do not go
> For weariness of thee,
> Nor in hope the world can show
> A fitter love for me.

In the same vein, and on the same theme, is the *Valediction : of Weeping* :

> O more than moon,
> Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere ;
> Weep me not dead in thine arms, but forbear
> To teach the sea what it may do too soon.

To the same class belongs the more famous *Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*, with its characteristic, fantastical yet felicitous, conceit of the compsses :

> Such wilt thou be to me who must,
> Like the other foot, obliquely run ;
> Thy firmness makes my circle just,
> And makes me end where I begun.

The seventeenth elegy, "By our first strange and fatal interview" may belong to the same group, and so probably do *The Canonization* and *The Anniversary*. In these, at any rate, Donne expresses a purer and more elevated strain of the same feeling as animates *The Dream, The Sun-Rising*, and *The Break of Day* ; and not a bit less remote from the trend of Petrarchan poetry. The truth and intensity with which Donne sings the joy of mutual and contented love reminds us of the peasant-poet Burns rather than of the average Elizabethan, even though Donne sings a more ingenious and closely woven strain :

> All other things to their destruction draw,
> Only our love hath no decay ;
> This no tomorrow hath nor yesterday,
> Running it never runs from us away,
> But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.
>
> (*The Anniversary*)

Of the shadow of this joy, the pain of parting, Donne writes also with the intensity of Burns though not with the simplicity of the Scottish poet. The passion of *The Expiration* is similar to that of Burns in kind and in degree, however elaborately and quaintly it may be phrased :

> So, so, break off this last lamenting kiss,
> Which sucks two souls, and vapours both away.
> Turn thou ghost that way, and let me turn this,
> And let ourselves benight our happiest day ;
> We ask'd none leave to love, nor will we owe
> Any, so cheap a death, as saying "Go".

The Ecstasy blends, and attempts to reconcile, the material and the spiritual elements of his realistic and his Platonic strains. But, subtly and highly wrought as that poem is, its reconciliation is more metaphysical than satisfying. It is in the simpler poems from which some lines have been quoted above that the diverse elements find their most natural and perfect union.

Donne's sincere and intense, though sometimes perverse and irritable, moods are a protest against the languid conventionality of Petrarchan sentiment. At the same time, his celebrated wit is no less a corrective to the lazy thinking of the sonneteers, their fashioning and re-fashioning of the same outworn conceits. Here is Carew's estimate of what Donne achieved for English poetry :

> The Muses' garden, with pedantic weeds
> O'er-spread, was purged by thee : the lazy seeds
> Of servile imitation thrown away,
> And fresh invention planted.

Donne would say what he felt and would say it in imagery of his own fashioning. He owes, probably, as little to Marino* or Gongora† as to Petrarch. "Metaphysical wit" is, doubtless, a symptom of the decadence of Renaissance poetry which, with all its beauty and freshness, carried seeds of decay in its bosom from the beginning. But the form which this disintegration took in the poetry of Donne is the expression of a unique and intense individuality : a complex, imaginative temperament ; a swift and subtle intellect ; a mind stored with the minutiae of medieval theology, science, and jurisprudence. The result is often bizarre, at times even repulsive. When the fashion in wit changed, Addison and Johnson could not see anything in Donne's poetry but far-sought ingenuity and extravagant hyperbole. His poetry has never, or never for long, the harmonious simplicity of perfect beauty ; but, at its best, it has both sincerity and strength, and these are also elements of beauty.

It would not be true to say that there is nothing of the harshness of the satires in the elegies and songs. In rhyming couplets, Donne was always striving after a fullness of thought, a freedom and swiftness of movement, which were not to be attained at once without some harshness of transition and displacement of accent, though a steady movement towards a greater degree of ease and balance can be traced from the satires and elegies to the *Anniversaries* and later *Funeral Elegies*. Even in the lyrics, there are harsh lines. Donne is careless of the minor beauties. But in the lyrics he has achieved his most felicitous effects, and succeeded in the making the stanza (long or short, simple or elaborate) the harmonious echo of that intimate wedding of passion and argument which is the essential quality of the "metaphysical" lyric. If Donne's influence is responsible for some deplorable aberrations of taste in English poetry, it is responsible also

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***Marino : Neapolitan poet (1569—1625).**

†Gongora : Spanish poet (1561—1627).

for the splendid cadences, the *elan*[*], of the finest seventeenth century lyrics from Jonson and Carew to Marvell and Rochester[†] and the blend of passion and argument in Dryden's ringing verse rhetoric.

The Progress of the Soul : Infinitati Sacrum. This is a poem the personal and historical significance of which has received inadequate attention from Donne's biographers. Starting from the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, it was Donne's intention, in this poem, to trace the migrations of the soul of that apple which Eve plucked, conducting it, when it reached the human plane, through the bodies of all the great heretics. It was to have rested at last in the body of Calvin ; but the grave and dignified stanzas with which the poem opens show clearly that Queen Elizabeth herself was to have closed the line of heretics whose descent was traced to the soul of Cain, or of Cain's wife :

> This soul to whom Luther and Mahomet were
> Prisons of flesh ; this soul which oft did tear,
> And mend the wracks of the Empire and late Rome,
> And lived when every great change did come.

Writing to Sir Thomas Egerton in the following February, Donne disclaims all "love of a corrupt religion". Yet, during the preceding year, he had been busy on an elaborate satire, delineating, from a Catholic standpoint, the descent and history of the great heretics from Arius and Mahomet to Calvin and Elizabeth. There can be little doubt that the mood of mind which found expression in this sombre poem was occasioned by the execution of Essex in the preceding February. It would have been interesting to read Donne's history of heresy, and characters of Mahomet and Luther, great, bad men as he apparently intended to portray them ; but the poem never got so far. After tracing through some tedious and even disgusting episodes, the life of the soul in vegetable and animal form, Donne leaves it just arrived in Themech,

> Sister and wife to Cain, Cain that first did plough.

The mood in which the poem was conceived had passed, or the poet felt his inventive power unequal to the task, and he closed the second canto abruptly with a stanza of more than Byronic scepticism and scorn[‡].

Verse-Letters and Funeral Elegies. The more normal and courtly moods of Donne's mind in these central years of his life are reflected in the *Verse-Letters* and *Funeral Elegies*. Of the former, the earliest probably were *The Storm* and *The Calm*, whose vivid and witty realism first made Donne's name known. The two epistles to Sir Henry Wotton beginning : "Sir, more than kisses letters mingle souls" and "Here's no more news than virtue" were probably both written in the same year, 1598. That on Wotton's appointment as ambassador to Venice was composed five years later. To Goodyer and to the Woodwards and Brookes, he wrote quite a number, in the same last years of the sixteenth century, not all of which are yet published. Those written to more noble patrons, generally ladies, were the work of Donne's years of suitorship. He seems to have written none after he took orders.

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[*] *elan*—vivacity ; impetuosity.

[†] Rochester : (1648—1680) a poet of genius, and a notorious libertine.

[‡] That Donne never contemplated publication of this poem is clear from the fact that he adopted the same title, *The Progress of the Soul*, for the very different *Anniversaries* on the death of Elizabeth Drury.

The moral reflections in these letters are elevated, and are developed with characteristic ingenuity. The brilliance with which a train of metaphysical compliments is elaborated in such a letter as that to the Countess of Bedford beginning "Madam—you have refined me" is dazzling. But neither Donne's art nor taste is seen to best advantage in the abstract, extravagant, and frigid conceits of these epistles and of such elegies as those on Prince Henry and Lord Harrington. The strain of eulogy to which Donne rises here passes all limits of decency and reverence. To two feelings, Donne was profoundly susceptible, and he has expressed both with wonderful eloquence in verse and prose. He has all the Renaissance sense of the pomp and the horror of death, the leveller of all earthly distinctions; and he can rise, like Sir Thomas Browne, to a rapt appreciation of the Christian vision of death as the prelude to a better life. But his expression of both moods is apt to degenerate into an accumulation of "gross and disgusting hyperboles." In an elegy on Mrs. Bulstred, which is divided into two separately printed poems, *Death I Recant* and *Death Be not Proud*, these moods are combined in a sonorous and dignified strain.

But the finest of Donne's funeral elegies is the second of the *Anniversaries*, which he composed on the death of Elizabeth Drury. The extravagance of his praise, indeed, offended even Jacobean readers, and the poem was declared by Ben Jonson to be "profane and full of blasphemies". However, Donne intended Elizabeth Drury to be taken as a symbol of Christian and womanly virtue. He may have known something of the Tuscan poets' metaphysic of love, for Donne is one of the few poets of the day who had read Dante. It cannot be said that he succeeded in investing his subject with the ideal atmosphere in which Dante's Beatrice moves. *The First Anniversary* is little more than a tissue of frigid, metaphysical hyperboles, relieved by occasional felicities, as the following famous lines :

Doth not a Teneriffe or higher hill
Rise so high like a rock, that one might think
The floating moon would shipwreck there and sink ?

The *Second*, however, is not only richer in such occasional jewels but is a finer poem. With the eulogy, which is itself managed with great art, though in a vein of extravagance jarring to our taste, the poet has interwoven a *meditatio mortis*, developed with the eloquence, the intense dull glow of feeling, and the sonorous cadences which we find again in the prose of Donne's sermons.

Religious poems. On Donne's religious verses other than the funeral elegies, the earliest, *On the Annunciation and Passion Falling upon one Day*, was written in 1608. *The Litany* was composed in the same year as *Pseudo-Martyr* ; and it is interesting to note that, though the Trinity is followed, in Catholic sequence, by the Virgin, the Angels, the Petrarchs and so forth, there is no invocation of these, but only commemoration. The two sequences of sonnets, *La Corona* and "Holy Sonnets", belong, the first to 1608-9, the second to the years of his priesthood. One of the latter refers to the recent death of his wife in 1617 ; and the *Lamentations of Jeremy* would appear to be a task which he set himself at the same juncture. The hymns *To Christ, At the Author's Last going into Germany* ; *To God, my God, in my Sickness* ; and *To God the Father*, were written in 1619, 1623-4, and 1631 respectively.

All Donne's poetry is of a piece. There is a striking difference of theme and spirit between the "love-song weeds and satiric thorns" of Donne's brilliant and daring youth on one hand and the hymns and sonnets of his closing years on the other. But the fundamental resemblance between the works of these two periods is closer. All that Donne wrote, whether in verse or prose, is of a piece. The same intense and subtle spirit which, in the songs and elegies, analysed the experiences of passion is at work in the latter on a different experience. To be didactic is never the first intention of Donne's religious poems, but, rather, to express himself, to analyse and lay bare his own moods of agitation, of aspiration, and of humiliation in the quest of God, and the surrender of his soul to Him. The same erudite and surprising imagery, the same passionate, reasoning strain, meets us in both.

In the Pacific Sea my home ? or are
The Eastern riches ? Is Jerusalem ?
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,
All straits (and none but straits) are ways to them,
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Ham, or Shem*.

The poet who, in the sincerities of a sick-bed confession, can spin such ingenious webs for his thought is one of those who are "naturally artificial", and for whom simplicity would be affectation. And as Donne is the first of the metaphysical love-poets, he is likewise the first of the introspective, Anglican, religious poets of the seventeenth century. Elizabethan, and a good deal of Jacobean, religious poetry is didactic in tone and intention and, when not Romanist, is Protestant and Calvinist but not distinctively Anglican. With Donne, there appears for the first time in poetry a passionate attachment to those Catholic elements in Anglicanism which, repressed and neglected, had never entirely disappeared ; and, from Donne, poets like Herbert and his disciples inherited the intensely personal

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**Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness.*

and introspective tone to which the didactic is subordinated, which makes a lyric in *The Temple*, even if it be a sermon also, and primarily a confession or a prayer ; a tone which reached its highest lyrical level in the ecstatic outpourings of Crashaw.

The poetry of Donne versus Elizabethan poetry. Elizabethan courtly poems such as *The Faerie Queene*, *Hero and Leander*, *Venice and Adonis*, *Astrophel and Stella* or *England's Helicon*, possess a clear beauty, rich ornamentation, and diffuse harmonies. All these characteristics disappear in the songs and satires and elegies of Donne who does not accept Elizabethan conventions and does not do homage to Elizabethan models, Italian and French. Donne puts out to discover a north-west passage of his own, determined to make his poetry the vivid reflection of his own intense, subtle, perverse moods, his paradoxical reasonings and curious learning, his sceptical philosophy of love and life. It cannot be said of Donne, as it can be said of Milton, that everything, even what is evil, turns to beauty in his hands. Beauty, with him, is never the paramount consideration. If beauty comes to him, it comes as to the alchemist who "glorifies his pregnant pot",

> If by the way to him befall
> Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal.
>
> (*Love's Alchemy*)

From the flow of impassioned, paradoxical argument, there will suddenly flower an image or a line of the rarest and most entrancing beauty. But the tenor of his poetry is witty, passionate, weighty, and moving ; never for long simply beautiful ; not infrequently bizarre ; at times even repellent.

The harmful influence of Donne. Just as Michael Angelo was a bad model for those who came after him and had not his strength and originality, Donne, more than any other single individual, is responsible for the worst aberrations of seventeenth-century poetry, especially in eulogy and elegy. The "metaphysical" lyricists learned most from him—the conquering, insolent tone of their love songs and their splendid cadences. In happy conceit and movement, they sometimes excelled him, though it is only in an occasional lyric by Marvell or Rochester that one detects the same weight of passion behind the fantastic conceit and paradoxical reasoning. But it is in the complimentary verses and the funeral elegies of the early and middle century (as well as in some of the religious poetry and in the frigid love-poems of Cowley) that we see the worst effects of Donne's attempts to wed passion and imagination to erudition and reasoning.

The beneficial influence of Donne. And yet it would be a serious mistake to ignore the unique quality of Donne's poetry or to regard its influence as wholly injurious. The influence of both Donne and Ben Jonson acted beneficially in counteracting the tendency of Elizabethan poetry towards fluency and facility. Donne certainly lowered to some extent the ethical and ideal tone of love-poetry, and he also wrecked the delicate bloom of Elizabethan song. But it goes to his credit that he gave it a more sincere and more passionate quality He made love-poetry less of a musical echo of Desportes. In his hands, English poetry became less Italianate, more sincere, more condensed, more pregnant in thought and feeling.

Donne versus Milton. The greatest* of seventeenth century poets, despite his contempt for "our late fantastics", and his affinities with the moral Spenserians and the classical Jonson, has all Donne's intense individuality, his complete independence, in the handling of his subjects, of the forms he adopts, even of his borrowings. He has all Donne's "frequency and fullness" of thought. He is not much less averse to the display of erudition, though he managed it more artfully. Nor is he much less averse to the interweaving of argument with poetry. But Milton had a far less keen and restless intellect than Donne ; his central convictions were more firmly held ; he was less conscious of the elements of contradiction which they contained ; his life moved forward on simpler and more consistent lines. With powers thus better harmonized, with a more controlling sense of beauty, with a fuller comprehension of the science of his art, Milton, rather than Donne, is, in achievement, the Michael Angelo of English poetry. Yet there are subtle qualities of vision, rare intensities of feeling, surprising felicities of expression in the troubled poetry of Donne that we would not like to lose even for the majestic strains of Milton.

Donne's influence. Donne's innovation in amatory verse was not his only contribution to the history of English poetry. The spirit of his best love-poetry passed into the most interesting of his elegies and his religious verses, the influence of which was not less than that of his songs. Of the regular, classically inspired English satirists, he is the first who deserves attention, the first whose work is in the line of later development, the only one of the 16th century satirists whose influence is still traceable in Dryden and Pope. Dryden's *Religio Laici* is indebted for some of its most characteristic arguments to Donne's "Kind pity checks my spleen" (*Satire III*). Pope found in Donne a satirist whose style and temper were closer in essential respects to his own than those of the suave and urbane Horace. For evil and for good, Donne is the most shaping and determining influence that meets us in passing from the 16th to the 17th century. In certain aspects of mind and training the most medieval, in temper the most modern, of his contemporaries, he is, with Jonson, the chief inspirer of his younger contemporaries, and successors, and the most potent herald and pioneer of the school of poetic argument and eloquence.

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*namely, Milton.

4

What is Metaphysical Poetry ?

I. Dr. Johnson on Metaphysical Poets

It was Dr. Johnson who described Donne and his followers as the metaphysical poets. The suggestion for his label he took from Dryden's statement : **"Donne affects the metaphysics"**. The description is not quite unfair, because the fondness of these poets for astonishing their readers with pieces of remote scholastic learning to a great extent justifies it, but there can be no doubt that Johnson chose the term metaphysical partly because there seems something contemptuous in it, and Johnson's attitude towards such rebels from poetic correctness could, on the whole, be no other than contemptuous. Thus his criticism of the metaphysicals gives us a poor opinion of them because, while he had a keen eye for their faults, he was largely blind to their virtues. But, about their faults, allowing for his exaggeration, he is usually correct.

It is worth while taking a look at what Johnson had to say about the metaphysical poets.

Johnson wrote : "Wit, like all other things subject by their nature to the choice of man, has its changes and fashions, and at different times takes different forms. About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the *metaphysical poets*.

The metaphysical poets were **men of learning**, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour ; but, unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear ; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.

If the father of criticism has rightly denominated poetry as an imitative art, these writers will, without great wrong, lose their right to the name of poets, for they cannot be said to have imitated anything ; they neither copied nature for life, neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect.

"Those, however, who deny them to be poets, allow them to be wits. Dryden confesses of himself and his contemporaries, that they fall below Donne in wit, and maintains that they surpass him in poetry.

"If wit be well described by Pope, as being 'that which has been often thought, but was never before so well expressed,' they certainly never attained, nor ever sought it ; for they endeavoured to be singular in their thoughts, and were careless of their diction. But Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous : he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language.

"If by a more noble and more adequate conception that he considered as wit which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just ; if it be that which he that never found it wonders how he missed it, to wit of this kind the metaphysical poets have seldom risen. Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural ; they are not obvious, but neither are they just ; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found.

"But wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors* ; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. **Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together** ; nature and art ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions ; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises ; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

"From this account of their compositions it will be readily inferred that they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. As they were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising, they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasure of other minds : they never inquired what, on any occasion, they should have said or done, but wrote rather as beholders than partakers of human nature ; as beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure ; as Epicurean deities, making remarks on the actions of men, and the vicissitudes of life, without interest and without emotion. Their courtship was void of fondness, and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had been never said before.

"Nor was the sublime more within their reach than the pathetic ; for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which at once fills the whole mind, and of which the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second rational admiration. Sublimity is produced by aggregation, and littleness by dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness. It is with great propriety that subtlety, which in its original import means exility of particles, is taken in its metaphorical meaning for nicety of distinction. Those writers who lay on the watch for novelty could have little hope of greatness ; for great things cannot have escaped former observation. Their attempts were always analytic ; they broke every image into fragments ; and could no more represent, by their slender conceits and laboured particularities, the prospects of nature, or the scenes of life, than he who dissects a sunbeam with a prism can exhibit the wide effulgence of a summer noon.

"What they wanted, however, of the sublime, they endeavoured to supply by hyperbole ; their amplification had no limits ; they left not only reason but fancy behind them ; and produced combinations of confused magnificence, that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined.

"Yet great labour, directed by great abilities, is never wholly lost : if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth ; if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan, it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the dignity of a writer, by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme, and volubility of syllables.

"In perusing the works of this race of authors, the mind is exercised either by recollection or inquiry ; either something already learned is to be retrieved, or something new is to be examined. If their greatness seldom elevates, their acuteness often surprises ; if the imagination is not always gratified, at least the powers of reflection and comparison are employed ; and in the mass of materials which ingenious absurdity has thrown together, genuine wit and useful knowledge may be sometimes found buried perhaps in grossness of expression, but useful to those who know their value ; and such as, when they are expanded to perspicuity, and polished to elegance, may give lustre to works which have more propriety though less copiousness of sentiment.

"This kind of writing, which was, I believe, borrowed from Marino and his followers, had been recommended by the example of Donne, a man of a very extensive and various knowledge ; and by Jonson, whose manner resembled that of Donne more in the ruggedness of his lines than in the cast of his sentiments.

"When their reputation was high, they had undoubtedly more imitators than time has left behind. Their immediate successors were Suckling, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Cleveland and Milton. Denham and Waller sought another way to fame, by improving the harmony of our numbers. Milton tried the metaphysic style only in his lines upon Hobson the Carrier. Cowley adopted it, and excelled his predecessors, having as much sentiment and more music. Suckling neither improved versification, nor abounded in conceits. The fashionable style remained chiefly with Cowley ; Suckling could not reach it, and Milton disdained it.

"As the authors of this race were perhaps more desirous of being admired than understood, **they sometimes drew their conceits from recesses of learning not very much frequented by common readers of poetry**. Thus Donne shows his medicinal knowledge in some encomiastic verses :

In everything there naturally grows
A balsamum to keep it fresh and new,
If 't were not injured by extrinsique blows ;
Your birth and beauty are this balm in you.
But you, of learning and religion,
And virtue, and such ingredients, have made
A mithridate, whose operation
Keeps off, or cures what can be done or said.
(To the Countess of Bedford)

Though the following lines of Donne, on the last night of the year, have something in them too scholastic, they are not inelegant :

This twilight of two years, not past nor next,
Some emblem is of me, or I of this,
Who, meteor-like, of stuff and form perplext,
Whose what and where in disputation is,
If I should call me anything, should miss.
I sum the years and me, and find me not
Debtor to the old, nor creditor to the new ;
That cannot say, my thanks I have forgot,
Nor trust this I with hopes ; and yet scarce true
This bravery is, since these times showed me you.
(To the Countess of Bedford)

Yet more abstruse and profound is Donne's reflection upon man as a microcosm :

If men be worlds, there is in every one
Something to answer in some proportion
All the world's riches : and in good men, this
Virtue, our form's form, and our soul's soul is.

The tears of lovers are always of great poetical account ; but Donne has extended them into worlds. If the lines are not easily understood, they may be read again :

On a round ball
A workman, that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All.
So doth each tear,
Which thee doth wear,
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.
(A Valediction : of Weeping)

On reading the following lines the reader may perhaps cry out—"Confusion worse confounded" :

Here lies a she-sun, and a he-moon there
She gives the best light to his sphere,
Or each is both, and all, and so
They unto one another nothing owe.
(*Epithalamion on the Count Palatine*)

Who but Donne would have thought that a good man is a telescope ?

Though God be our true glass through which we see
All, since the being of all things is He,
Yet are the trunks, which do to us derive
Things in proportion fit, by perspective
Deeds of good men ; for by their living here
Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near.

The poetical effect of a lover's name upon glass is thus described :

My name engraved herein
Doth contribute my firmness to this glass ;
Which, ever since that charm, hath been
As hard, as that which graved it, was.
(*A Valediction : Of my Name in the Window*)

The poetical propagation of light :

The prince's favour is diffused o'er all,
From which all fortunes, names, and natures fall ;
Then from those wombs of stars, the bride's bright eyes,
At every glance a constellation flies

……

First her eyes kindles other ladies' eyes,
Then from their beams their jewels' lustres rise ;
And from their jewels torches do take fire,
And all is warmth, and light, and good desire.

By the same author, a common topic, the danger of procrastination, is thus illustrated :

That which I should have begun
In my youth's morning, now late must be done ;
And I, as giddy travellers must do,
Which stray or sleep all day, and having lost
Light and strength, dark and tired, must then ride post.
(*To M.B.B.*)

All that man has to do is to live and die. The sum of humanity is comprehended by Donne in the following lines :

Think in how poor a prison thou didst lie ;
After enabled but to suck and cry.

……

But think that death hath now enfranchised thee ;
Thou hast thy expansion now, and liberty ;

Think that a rusty piece discharged is flown
In pieces, and the bullet is his own,
And freely flies : this to thy soul allow,
Think thy shell broke, think thy soul hatched but now.
(*The Progress of the Soul*)

The meditations of a lover are described in the following indelicate manner :

As the sweet sweat of roses in a still,
As that which from chafed musk-cat's pores doth trill,
As the almighty balm of the early East ;
Such are the sweat drops of my mistress' breast.
And on her neck her skin such lustre sets,
They seem no sweat drops, but pearl coronets :
Rank, sweaty froth thy mistress' brow defiles.
(*Elegy VIII*)

Regarding the comparison of a man that travels, and his wife that stays at home, with a pair of compasses, it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has the better claim. (This comparison occurs in *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*). In all these examples it is apparent, that whatever is improper or vicious is produced by a voluntary deviation from nature in pursuit of something new and strange ; and that the writer fails to give delight, by his desire of exciting admiration.

II. A Modern Critic* on Metaphysical Poety

Here are some of the observations of an eminent modern critic on metaphysical poetry and on Donne :

Term of disapprobation. "What we call metaphysical poetry was referred to by contemporaries as 'strong lines' a term which calls attention to other elemets in metaphysical poetry than its fondness for indulging in nice speculations of philosophy in unusual contexts. Like the later term 'metaphysical', the term 'strong-lined' is a term of disapprobation.

Concentration. "The first characteristic that I shall isolate in trying to discuss the admittedly vague term 'metaphysical poetry' is its concentration. The reader is held to an idea or a line of argument. He is not invited to pause upon a passage, and reflect upon it. A metaphysical poem tends to be brief, and is always closely woven.

Expanded epigram. "Concentration and a sinewy strength of style is the mark of Ben Jonson as well as of Donne. Behind both, as behind much of poetry of their followers, lies the classical epigram, and there is some truth in saying that a metaphysical poem is an expanded epigram.

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*Helen Gardner.

Versification. "The desire for concentration and concision marks also the verse forms characteristic of the 17th century lyric. It appears in the fondness for a line of eight syllables rather than a line of ten, and in the use of stanzas employing lines of varying length into which the sense seems packed, or of stanzas built on very short lines. The metaphysical poets favoured either very simple verse forms, octosyllabic couplets or quatrains, or else stanzas created for the particular poem, in which length of line and rhyme scheme artfully enforced the sense.

Fondness for conceits. "The second characteristic of metaphysical poetry, its most immediately striking feature, is its fondness for conceits, and here, of course Jonson and Donne part company. A conceit is a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness, or, at least, is more immediately striking. All comparisons discover likeness in things unlike : a comparison becomes a conceit when we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness. A brief comparison can be a conceit if two things patently unlike, or which we should never think of together, are shown to be alike in a single point in such a way, or in such a context, that we feel their incongruity.

"**Argument** and **persuasion**, and **the use of the conceit** as their instrument, are the elements or body of a metaphysical poem. Its quintessence or soul is the vivid imagining of a moment of experience or of a situation out of which the need to argue, or persuade, or define arises. Metaphysical poetry is famous for its abrupt, personal openings in which a man speaks to his mistress, or addresses his God, or sets a scene, or calls us to mark this or see that.

Donne's metaphysical love poems. "The most serious and impassioned love poetry of the (seventeenth) century argues, or assumes as a base for argument, that love is a relation between two persons loving—'It cannot *be* love till I love her that loves me'*. The poem which Donne wrote on the experience of loving where love is returned, poems in which "thou" and "I" are merged into "we" are his most original and profound contribution to the poetry of human love. It is not possible to find models for such poems as *The Good-Morrow*, *The Anniversary*, *The Canonization*, and, less perfect but still wonderful, *The Ecstasy*. These poems have the right to the title 'metaphysical' in its true sense, since they raise, even when they do not explicilty discuss, the great metaphysical question of the relation of the spirit and the senses. They raise it not as an abstract problem, but in the effort to make the exprience of the union of human powers in love, and the union of two human beings in love, apprehensible. We never lose our sense of a 'little room' which love has made 'an everywhere†'. "

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* from *Love's Deity*.

† from *The Good Morrow*.

5

T. S. Eliot on Metaphysical Poetry

According to T.S. Eliot the phrase "metaphysical poetry" has long been employed as a term of abuse, or as the label of a quaint and pleasant taste. The question, he says, is to what extent the so-called metaphysicals formed a school, and how far this so-called school or movement is a digression from the main current.

Not only is it extremely difficult to define metaphysical poetry, T.S. Eliot goes on to say, but difficult to decide which poets practise it and in which of their verses. It is difficult to find any precise use of metaphor, simile, or other conceit, which is common to all the poets and at the same time important enough as an element of style to isolate these poets as a group. Donne and often Cowley, employ a device which is sometimes considered characteristically "metaphysicall", the elaboration (contrasted with the condensation) of a figure of speech to the furthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it. Thus Cowley develops the commonplace comparisan of the world to a chess-board through long stanzas in the poem *To Destiny* Donne, with more grace, develops, in *A Valediction*, the comparison of two lovers to a pair of compasses. But elsewhere we find, instead of the merely explication of the content of a comparison, a development by rapid association of thought which requires considerable agility on the part of the readers, as in the following lines :

On a round ball
A workman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,
So that each tear
Which thee doth wear
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow.
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so*

Here we find at least two connections which are not implicit in the first figure, but are forced upon it by the poet : from the geographer's globe to the tear, and the tear to the deluge. On the other hand, some of Donne's most successful and characteristic effects are secured by brief words and sudden contrasts :

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*A *Valediction : Of Weeping.*

> A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,

where the most powerful effect is produced by the sudden contrast of associations of "bright hair" and of "bone". This telescoping of images and multiplied associations is characteristic of the phrase of some of the dramatists of the period which Donne knew : not to mention Shakespeare, it is frequent in Middleton[*], Webster[**] and Tourneur[†] is and one of the sources of the vitality of their language.

T.S. Eliot next refers to Dr. Johnson's use of the term "metaphysical poets". Johnson, who had Donne, Cleveland and Cowley chiefly in mind, remarks of them that "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together". The force of this impeachment, arcording to Eliot, lies in the failure of the conjunction, the fact that often the ideas are yoked but not united ; and if we are to judge of styles of poetry by their abuse, enough examples may be found in Cleveland to justify Johnson's condemnation, But a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind in omnipresent in poetry. We may find an illustration in some of the best lines of Johnson himself. (Eliot quotes a few lines from *The Vanity of Human Wishes* to show that the effect there is due to a contrast of ideas, different in degree but the same in principle as that which Johnson mildly condemned).

Eliot says that the language of the metaphysical poets is as a rule simple and pure ; in the verse of George Herbert this simplicity is carried as far as it can go—a simplicity emulated without success by numerous modern poets. The *structure* of the sentences, on the other hand, is sometimes far from simple. But this is not a vice. It is a fidelity to thought and feeling. The effect, at its best, is far less artificial than that of an ode by Gray. And as this fidelity induces variety of thought and feeling, so it induces variety of music. Eliot illustrates this point by saying that Marvell's *Coy Mistress* produces an effect of great speed by the use of short syllables and that Crashaw's *Saint Teresa* produces an ecclesiastical solemnity by the use of long ones

In Eliot's opinion the poets of the seventeenth century (up to the Revolution[‡]) were the direct and normal development of the preceding age and their virtue was something permanently valuable, which subsequently disappeared but ought not to have disappeared. Johnson has hit, perhaps by accident, on one of their peculiarities, when he observes that "their attempts were always analytic" ; but he did not agree that, after the dissociation, they put the material together again in a new unity.

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[*] Middleton—(1570-1627), wrote satirical comedies of contemporary manners.

[**] Webster—(1580-1625), author of *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, etc.

[†] Tourneur—Cyril Turner (1575-1626), dramatist. Wrote *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Atheist's Tragedy*.

[‡] The Revolution—This refers to the transference of power from James II to William of Orange in 1688-1689.

In Chapman, says Eliot, there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought or a recreation of thought into feeling, which is exactly what is to be found in Donne :

> In this one thing, all the discipline
> Of manners and of manhood is contained ;
> A man to join himself with th' universe
> In his main sway, and make in all things fit
> One with that All, and go on, round as it ;
> Not plucking from the whole his wretched part,
> And into straits, or into nought revert,
> Wishing the complete Universe might be
> Subject to such a rag of it as he ;
> But to consider great Necessity.

Eliot then draws a distinction between the intellectual poet and the reflective poet. Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think ; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience ; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience ; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary.

Eliot continues this line of thought with a theory. The poets of the 17th century, the successors of the dramatists of the 16th, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience. They are simple, artificial, difficult, or fantastic, as their predecessors were. In the 17th century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which English poets have never recovered since ; and this dissociation was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century—Milton and Dryden. Each of these men performed certain poetic functions so magnificently well that the magnitude of the effect concealed the absence of others. The language went on and in some respects improved ; the best verse of Collins, Gray, Johnson, and even Goldsmith satisfies some of the demands better than that of Donne or Marvell, or King. But while the language became more refined, the feeling became more crude. The feeling, the sensibility, expressed in Gray's elegy is cruder than that in Marvell's *Coy Mistress*.

The second effect of the influence of Milton and Dryden followed from the first, and was therefore slow in manifestation. The sentimental age began early in the 18th century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative*, the descriptive ; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced ; they reflected.

The question may be asked : What would have been the fate of the "metaphysical" had the current of poetry descended in a direct line from them, as it descended in a direct line to them ? They would not, certainly, be classified as metaphysical. These poets have, like other poets, various faults. But they were, at best engaged in

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***ratiocinative*—pertaining to logical processes or formal reasoning.**

the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling. And this means both that they are more mature, and that they wear better, than later poets of no less literary ability.

It appears likely that poets in our civilizatian must be *difficult*. Our civilization represents great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. Hence we get something which looks very much like the conceit—we get, in fact, a method curiously similar to that of the "metaphysical poets", similar also in its use of obscure words and of simple phrasing.

It is interesting to speculate whether it is not a misfortune that two of the greatest masters of diction in English—Milton and Dryden—triumph with a dazzling disregard of the soul. If England continued to produce Miltons and Drydens it might not so much matter, but as things are English poetry has remained incomplete. Those who object to the "artificiality" of Milton or Dryden sometimes tell us to "look into our hearts and write". But that is not looking deep enough ; Donne looked into a good deal more than the heart. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts.

It is possible, then, to conclude that Donne, Crashaw, Vaughan, Herbert and Lord Herbert, Marvell, King, Cowley at his best, are in the direct current of English poetry, and that their faults should be reprimanded by this standard rather than coddled by antiquarian affection. They have been enough praised in terms which are implicit limitations because they are "metaphysical" or "witty", "quaint" or "obscure", though at their best they have not these attributes more than other serious poets. On the other hand, we must not reject the criticism of Johnson without having assimilated the Johnsonian canons of taste. We must remember that Johnson castigates chiefly the chief offenders, Cowley and Cleveland.

6

Critical Approaches To Donne's Poetry

I

Characteristics of metaphysical poetry. One group of poets in the first half of the 17th century have been called "metaphysical". The connotation of the term "metaphysical" has thus been summarized by an eminent critic : This term, he says, "lays stress on the more intellectual, less verbal character of their* wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans ; the finer psychology of which their conceits are often the expression ; their learned imagery ; the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics ; above all, the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination, which is their greatest achievement."

Dr. Johnson's analysis of metaphysical poetry. Donne was the father of what Dr. Johnson, following Dryden, called the "metaphysical" school of poets. Whatever Johnson meant, much of Donne's poetry may be called metaphysical in the ordinary sense of the word, if philosophy be what Plato called it, "a practising for death." Donne brooded much on death and on the relation of soul and body. In his middle years, his subtle, self-tormenting mind, was in a flux, his early faith corroded by the scepticism and neo-paganism of the Renaissance, and the scheme of things which he had learned from the School-men shattered by the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, so that in the *Second Anniversary* he concluded that the world, physical and moral, was dissolving in corruptions which human reason could not cure, and took refuge in the ark of the Church.

But what Johnson had in mind was not so much the substance of Donne's thought as the **extravagant conceits** in which he clothed it. Conceits (that is, surprising collocations of ideas) are common enough in Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry ; but no poet ever sprang so many and such strange surprises on his readers as Donne. Others had written of parted lovers, but nobody before Donne had ever thought of comparing them to the legs of a pair of compasses. **Donne's wit followed no fashion**. It was the natural working of a mind exceptionally quick to perceive likeness in things divergent. From his multifarious learning came analogies thick and fast, and

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*their—*i.e* , that of the metaphysical poets.

they found their way into verse. But conceits are not poetry unless they stir emotions deeper than mere surprise, and this Donne's often fail to do. Yet, in the best of his love-poems and his divine poems, wit and passion often mingle in some electrifying phrase, and we are ready to declare with Ben Jonson that Donne is the first poet in the world "for some things"

After a period in which Donne "ruled as he thought fit The universal monarchy of wit*", his poetry passed through a long eclipse, which began to lighten with De Quincey and Coleridge, and was impressively brightened by the admiration of Robert Browning who was, of all love poets, the nearest in some respects to Donne. In the twentieth century, Donne regained a more discriminating but hardly less enthusiatic appreciation than he enjoyed in his own time.

Donne's influence was powerful for good and for ill. He smashed the Petrarchan convention with its sugared diction, and brought love-poetry some way back to nature. If his conceits are extravagant, his vocabulary is simple. But for writers who had none of his passion and imagination, no model could be worse, as much of the poetry from Cleveland to Cowley clearly shows. (Donne's poetry ranges from sensual elegies to holy sonnets). (His *Satires* are early work dealing topically with the common-places of Roman satire; but the third which warns the reader to "doubt wisely" yet to

> Strive so, that before age, death's twilight
> Thy soul rest, for none can work in that night,

reveals the detachment rather than scepticism of the ex-Catholic.)

II

Donne's fame in the 20th century. John Donne was spoken of by his contemporary, Ben Jonson, as "the first poet in the world in some things". When he died, as Dean of St. Paul's, he had earned another reputation as the greatest preacher of his age. Both as poet and priest he sank in reputation after the Restoration. But in the 20th century he rose, as a poet, to a fame as great as he had enjoyed when living, or even greater; and interest in his poetry brought a revival of interest in his sermons. As master of the so-called "metaphysical school" of poets he became the idol of critics in England and the United States, and the influence of his highly individual style can be seen widely in poetry written between World Wars I and II.

Passion and ratiocination. In his own day Donne's poetry was praised for its wit. The 20th century, although acknowledging the brilliance of his use of unexpected and recondite images, pedantically precise hyperboles and daring paradoxes, values him more for his power to catch in verse the ring of passion and to render the accents of a "naked and thinking heart". It was the blend of passion and ratiocination, or the illusion which his poetry gives that thought and argument are arising immediately out of passionate feeling, which made him the master of both the later W.B. Yeats and of the young T.S. Eliot, who were reacting against the meditative lyricism of the romantic tradition in its decline. Combined with this play of intellect and scorn of conventionally poetic imagery goes a refusal of poetic diction and a handling of metrical effects which makes Donne's poetry hover between the singing voice of passion and the speaking voice of argument and expostulation. This dramatic realism o style and versification made him the idol of the first half of thef 20th century. He was perhaps over-praised : but at his best he gives, as almost no other poet does, the illusion that we are listening to the very accent of passion become conscious of its power.

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*It was Carew who paid this compliment to Donne Thomas Carew was a Caroline poet and a contemporary of Donne. He wrote Donne's epitaph in the following words:

> Here lies a King, that rul'd as he thought fit
> The universal Monarchy of wit.

One of the foremost love-poets. As a poet Donne still suffers from his alleged occasional crudities ; while his metaphysical arguments and conceits are obscure to many readers. But the originality, force, and passion of his lyrics, the glowing and sensuous records of what were evidently personal experiences, the sceptical and subtle thought, place him among the foremost love-poets. *The Ecstasy* and *The Sun Rising* show Donne perhaps at his best. The brilliant, bitter *Satires*, 1593—97, are among the earliest English rhymed couplets. After about 1608 he turned to spiritual poems and intellectual exercises in theological verse ; the superb sonnet "Death, be not proud", and "A Hymn to God the Father" may be mentioned from this period.

Frankness and realism. Most of his "Songs and Sonets" purport to deal with life, descriptively or experimentally, and the first thing to strike the reader is Donne's extraordinary frankness and penetrating realism. The next is the cynicism which marks certain of the lighter poems and which represents a conscious reaction from the extreme idealization of woman encouraged by the Petrarchan tradition. In his serious love-poems, however, while not relaxing his grip on the realities of the love-experience, he suffuses it with an emotional intensity and a spiritualized ardour unique in English poetry.

Use of conceits. This astonishing new poetry took the literary world of London by storm. But as striking as the novelty of subject-matter and point of view is that of its form. Instead of the unvarying succession of sonnets, he gives nearly every theme a verse and stanza form peculiar to itself ; and instead of decorating his theme by conventional comparisons, he illumines or emphasizes his thought by fantastic metaphors and extravagant hyperboles. In moments of inspiration his style becomes wonderfully poignant and direct, heart-searching in its simple human accents, with an originality and force for which we look in vain among the clear and fluent melodies of Elizabethan lyrists. Sometimes the "conceits" are so odd that we lose sight of the thing to be illustrated, in the startling nature of the illustration. With him love is a spider which, dropped into the wine of life, turns it to poison ; or it is a cannon-ball :

> "By him, as by chain'd shot, whole ranks do die" ;

or it is a devouring fish :

> "He is the tyrant Pike, our hearts the Fry".

This fashion of "conceitful" writing, somewhat like euphuism in prose, appeared in Italy and Spain also. Its imaginative exuberance has its parallels in baroque architecture and painting.

Spiritual gloom. After the death of his wife in 1617 Donne fell more and more under the shadow of a terrible spiritual gloom. Even in his early "Songs and Sonets", there are touches of macabre imagination, as in *The Relic* :

> When my grave is broken up again
> Some second guest to entertain
> ....
> And he that digs it spies
> A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,
> Will he not let us alone ?

Religious poems and sermons. Donne's religions poems and his magnificent sermons reached astounding heights of subtlety and intensity. The searchings of soul and the horrified fascination with which he contemplated the process of dissolution and the awful event of death are rendered with amazing intellectual ingenuity and imaginative power.

Careless of style. Donne's poetry is so uneven, at times so startling and fantastic, that few critics would care to recommend it to others. Only a few will read his works, and they must be left to their own browsing, to find what pleases them. One who reads much will probably bewail Donne's lack of any consistent style or literary standard. For instance, Chaucer and Milton are as different as two poets could well be ; yet the work of each is marked by a distinct and consistent style, and it is the style as much as the matter which makes *The Canterbury Tales* or the *Paradise Lost* a work for all time. Donne threw style and all literary standards to the winds ; and precisely for this reason he is forgotten, though his great intellect and his genius had marked him as one of those who should do things worthy to be remembered. While the tendency of literature is to exalt style at the expense of thought, the world has many men and women who exalt feeling and thought above expression ; and to these Donne is good reading. Browning is of the same school, and compels attention. While Donne played havoc with Elizabethan style, he nevertheless influenced English literature in the way of boldness and originality ; and the present tendency is to give him a larger place, nearer to the few great poets, than he has occupied since Ben Jonson declared that he was "the first poet of the world in some things", but likely to perish "for not being understood". For to much of his poetry we must apply his own satiric verses on another's crudities :

> Infinite work ! which doth so far extend
> That none can study it to any end.

Classification of his poems. Donne's poetry can be roughly classified. We have his love poetry up to about 1601, followed, from about 1605, by his religious poetry, which was preluded by his reflective, but not definitely religious poetry, and akin to the reflective poems are his elegies. His witty, thoughtful, but rugged satires may probably be assigned to 1593—98, and his companion poems *The Storm* and *The Calm* belong to 1596, being the fruit of the Cadiz expedition.

Love-poems. Donne's love-poems are divided by his marriage. Those written before his marriage betray the young man cast loose on the stream of the senses and emotions with little control from the conscience. Gone are the Platonic vision of Spenser's hymns, and the pretty Petrarchan conventions of the Sonneteers. In their place we have realism, joined to a bitter, mocking cynicism. The note suggests the young poet in mood not very different from that which drew from Shakespeare the sonnet beginning

> The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action.

In fact the key-note is sincerity, and that sincerity remains in the mellow, purer love songs which followed his marriage, and whose tone finds admirable expression in these lines from *The Anniversary* :

> Only our love hath no decay ;
> This no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday ;
> Running it never runs from us away,
> But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Reflective poems. The longer, serious reflective poetry of Donne consists chiefly of *The Progress of the Soul* (1601) and *The Anatomy of the World* (1611). The former seeks to trace the progress of a soul supposed to reside in Eve's apple up through the vegetable, mineral, and animal kingdoms to man. It shows the perverse ingenuity of a young and learned poet, serious but sceptical. The latter is an elegy in origin, but it expands to form a kind of sequel to the former, for Donne, now nearing the time of his conversion (from his Roman Catholic faith to Anglicanism) is here far more Christian and goes on to contemplate the progress of the soul to the next world. As poetry *The Anatomy* is tedious with its tortuous thought, awkward expression, and uneven, prosaic rhythm.

Divine poems. Donne's "Divine Poems" are a record of the varying moods of his spiritual life. He broods with his subtle, penetrating intellect and his fiery, intense imagination upon the problems of faith and sin. His submission to God is not one given lightly but when, it is given, it is rendered with absolute completeness. Thus, in lines which throb with passion, he adjures God :

Batter my heart, three-person'd God ; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine and seek to mend ;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new.

Yet he has his moods too, when he does not hesitate to face God boldly with questions : "If serpents envious cannot be damned, alas ! why should I be ?"

Obscurity. Apart from the intellectual, emotional and imaginative qualities already indicated, the chief characteristics of Donne's poetry are his obscurity, his inequality, and his violence. The obscurity is due partly to the fact that, like Shakespeare in his later days, he has deeper thoughts than words will readily convey, and that he tries to express them in too few words, and partly to his "metaphysical ' indulgence in difficult "conceits". Among his simpler, but ridiculous conceitss are the well-known comparison of a pair of lovers to a pair of compasses, and the lines :

Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string.

His inequality is annoying and perverse. Many times he begins a poem smoothly and beautifully, only to continue harshly and obscurely. One lyric, for example, begins :

I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Who died before the god of love was born

and continues with such lines as these :

His office was indulgently to fit
Actives to passives. Correspondency
Only his subject was.

His violence is, however, perhaps more of a virtue than a fault. Startling as his abrupt and unusual phrases often are, they harmonise with his thought and emotion.

To sum up Donne, it is not far from the truth to call him a lesser Browning of the 17th century. Ben Jonson said that he was the first poet in the world in some things, that for not keeping of accent he deserved hanging, and that he would perish through not being understood.

III

Spiritualism, sensuality, obscurity. There is a strange division between the two periods of Donne's life and the two classes of his verse. Roughly speaking, almost the whole of at least his secular verse belongs to the first division of his life, and almost the whole of his prose to the second. Again, by far the greater part of his verse is characterized by what may be called a spiritualised worldliness and sensuality, the whole of the prose by a spiritualism which has left worldliness far behind. Always in Donne are the two conflicting forces of intense enjoyment of the present, and intense feeling of the contrast of that present with the future. He has at once the transcendentalism which saves sensuality, and the passion which saves mysticism. Indeed, the two currents run so full and strong in him, and they clash so boisterously, that this is of itself sufficient to account for the obscurity, the extravagance, and the undue quaintness with which he has been charged.

Three categories of his poems. For critical purposes, the poetical works of Donne may be divided into three parts : (1) The Satires which, beyond all doubt, belong to his early career. (2) The Elegies and other amatory poems, most of which are cer- tainly early likewise. (3) The Divine and Miscellaneous Poems, some of which may not be late, but most of which certainly are. All three divisions have certain characteristics in common ; but the best of these characteristics, and some which are not common to the three, belong to the second and third divisions only.

Harshness of verse. It was the opinion of the late seventeenth and of the whole of the eighteenth century that Donne, though a clever man, had no ear. This opinion was doubtless based on Donne's Satires in which Donne certainly takes singular liberties no matter by what metric scheme they are judged.

Characteristics of his satiric verse. Satiric verse among the ancients took licences which no poet in other styles would have thought of taking. Horace and Persius illustrate this point. It is quite possible that Donne and other satirists of the late sixteenth century imitated these licences. The satiric pieces of Donne have the least share of his poetical interest. But they do display to the full his manly strength and shrewd sense. They are also noticeable in so far as they exhibit much less of that extravagant exaggeration of contemporary vice and folly which makes one of their chief contemporaries, Marston's *Scourge of Villainy*, almost an absured thing. We cannot indeed suppose that Donne's satire was wholly and entirely sincere, but a good deal in it clearly was. Thus his handling of the perennial subjects of satire is far more fresh, serious, and direct than is usual with satirists, and it was no doubt this judicious and direct quality which commended it to Pope. Moreover, these satires contain many fine touches. The Captain in *Satire I*, "Bright parcel-gilt with forty dead men's pay" ; the ingenious evil-doers in *Satire II*, "for whose sinful sake/Schoolmen new tenements in hell must make" ; the charming touch at once so literary and so natural in *Satire V* "so controverted lands/'Scape, like Angelica, the striver's hands" ;— these are only a few of the jewels that might be produced a specimens.

His distinctive qualities. But it is not in the satires tha we find the true Donne. It was not this province of the "univer sal monarchy of wit" that he ruled with supreme power. Th provinces that he did so rule were quite other : strange frontie regions, uttermost isles where sensuality, philosophy, and devotio meet, or where separately dwelling they rejoice or mourn over th conquest of each other. *The Progress of the Soul* is not among th greatest of Donne's works, but it contains wonderful things. What a line is : "Great Destiny, the Commissary of God !" What a lift and sweep is there in the fifth stanza : "To my six lustres almost now outwore !" What a thought, that "This soul, to whom Luther and Mahomet were/Prisons of flesh !" And the same amazing pregnancy of thought and expression runs through the whole.

Devotional thought. The successive stages of *The Anatomy of the World* contain the most marvellous poetical exposition of a certain kind of devotional thought yet given. In Donne there existed pre-eminently a union of the sensual, intellectual, poetical, and religious temperaments, and this mixture found expression in him as it has never done before or since. The greatest of this singular group of poems is *The Second Anniversary*, of which the following passage has become famous and is constantly quoted and praised :

> Her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks and so distinctly wrought,
> That one might almost say her body thought,......

Here is that most vivid and original of Donne's many meditations on death, as

> A groom
> That brings a taper to the outward room.

Here too is the singular undertone of "she" repeated constantly in different places of the verse, with the effect of a sort of musical accompaniment or refrain. But these, and many other separate verbal or musical beauties are exceeded by the wonder of the strange, dreamy atmosphere of moonlight thought and feeling which is shed over the whole piece. Nowhere is Donne, one of the most full-blooded and yet one of the least earthly of English poets, quite so unearthly.

Elegies. Among the Elegies, the one entitled *On His Mistress* ("By our first strange and fatal interview") is one of the few pieces which have been praised enough, if not even a little over-praised. As a matter of taste, it seems indeed more open to objection than the equally famous and much criticised (*To His Mistress Going to Bed*) which is a piece of frank naturalism saved from coarseness by passion and poetic completeness. The Elegies again are most varied of the divisions of Donne's works, and contain next to the Satires, his liveliest touches, such as

> The grim eight-foot-high, iron-bound, serving-man,
> That oft names God in oaths, and only than (that is, *then*)
> *Elegy IV*)

or as the stroke : "Lank as an unthrift's purse". (*Elegy IX*)

Epithalamia. In Epithalamia, Donne was good, but not perfect, falling far short of his master, Spenser, in this branch. No part of his work was more famous in his own day than his Epistles which are headed by *The Storm* and *The Calm*, that so did please Ben Jonson. But in these and other pieces of the same division, the misplaced ingenuity, which forms the basis of the general criticism of

Donne, appears less excusable than anywhere else. Great passion of love, of grief, of philosophical meditation, of religious awe, had the power to master Donne's fantastic imagination, and make it wholly serviceable ; but in his less intense works this imagination was rather unmanageable. Yet there are very fine touches here also, especially in the Epistle to Sir Henry Goodyer, and those to the Countess of Bedford and the Countess of Huntingdon. The best of the Funeral Elegies are those of Mrs. Boulstred.

Divine poems. In the Divine poems there is nothing so really divine as the astonishing verse from *The Second Anniversary* quoted above. It seems odd that Donne should have taken the trouble to tag the Lamentations of Jeremiah into verse. *A Litany* is far better.

The lyrics of love. But no division of Donne's poems shows him in his essence as do the lyrics. In these the peculiar quality of Donne flames through and perfumes the dusky air which is his native atmosphere. Everybody knows the "Bracelet of bright hair about the bone" of the late discovered skeleton, identifying the lover (*The Relic*) ; and everybody knows the perfect fancy and phrase of the opening of *Love's Deity* :

> I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
> Who died before the god of love was born.

But similar touches are almost everywhere. The embodying once for all in the simplest words of a universal thought :

> I wonder by my troth what thou and I
> Did till we lov'd ? (*The Good Morrow*)

The selection of single adjectives to do the duty of a whole train of surplusage :

> Where can we find two better hemispheres
> Without *sharp* north, without *declining* west ?
> (*The Good Morrow*)

In comparison with these things, such a poem as "Go and catch a falling star", delightful as it is, is perhaps only a delightful quaintness, and *The Indifferent* only a pleasant quip consummately turned. Donne's natural and genuine work reappears in such poems as *The Canonization*, or as *The Legacy*. No one who sees these poems as mere literary or fashionable exercises can ever appreciate such an *aubade** as "Stay O Sweet, and do not rise", or such a midnight piece as *The Dream* with its never-to-be-forgotten couplet :

> I must confess, it could not choose but be
> Profane to think thee anything but thee.

If there is less quintessence in *The Message*, for all its beauty, it is only because no one can stay long at the point of rapture which characterises Donne at his most characteristic, and the relaxation is natural. But the passionate mood, or that of mystical reflection, soon returns, and in the one Donne sings with another of the wondrous phrases where simplicity and perfection meet :

**aubade*—a song about the dawn.

So to engraft our hands as yet
Was all our means to make us one,
And pictures in our eyes to get
Was all our propagation. (*The Ecstasy*)

Or in the other he dwells on the hope of buried lovers :

To make their souls at the last busy day,
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay. (*The Relic*)

His faults. Donne's faults are so gross, so open, so palpable, that they hardly need to be emphasised. But this very peculiarity obscures his beauties. Readers are shocked or bored. or irritated, or puzzled, by his occasional nastiness, his frequent involution and eccentricity, his not quite rare extravagances which go near to silliness ; and so they lose the extraordinary beauties which lie beyond or among these faults. But for those of the readers who understand the ups and downs, the ins and outs of the human temperament, the alternations of passion and satiety, of passion and laughter, of passion and melancholy reflection, of passion earthly enough and spiritual rapture almost heavenly, there is no poet like Donne. Even the strangely mixed and flawed character of his style is an index and reflection of the variety and the rapid changes of his thought and feeling. To the praise of the highest poetical art he cannot indeed lay claim. But if he cannot receive that praise, he is entitled to praise as an inspired poetical creator. To express infinity no doubt is an impossibility. But no poet has gone nearer to the hinting and the suggesting of this infinite quality of passion, and of the relapses and reactions from passion, than the author of *The Second Anniversary*, *The Dream*, *The Relic*, and *The Ecstasy*.

IV

Roughness of style and content. Donne brings us up against the human situation without compromise : he writes, therefore, in verse which is far removed from Spenserian sweetness :

I sing not, Siren-like, to tempt ; for I
Am harsh.

His verses, once rejected because of their roughness both of content and of style are, indeed, at another pole from those of Spenser. That they have power, and originality, and contain the essence of one kind of truth is undeniable. Donne is both passionate and cold at the same time. Disillusioned with human life he is merciless in exposing weakness and corruption—but mostly that within himself. Possessing one of the keenest brains of his generation he analyses and satirizes, and then suddenly turns aside to make an overwhelmingly effective harmony of unlikely, unpoetical words. A great arist fuses matter, or idea, with manner, or expression, so that the two become as one. Donne had a capacity for doing so though his method was unusual. He ransacks science and learning for his vocabulary and his images. He seems almost to maltreat language, but only to achieve a more telling effect. He commands the commonplace, but in order to reveal deeper thoughts through compelling allusions. Donne's poetry has a kind of violence, a hardness, but out of this hardness comes the element of sympathy (sympathy, which means the ability to understand suffering through suffering). Thus Donne, obsessed by the thought, finds the ultimate reality of suffering in dying.

Contemplation of death. It is in his contemplation of death that Donne is most realistic. And yet death is a cheat, the creature of sin. In the tenth of his "Divine Poems" he shows both his anger at the instruments of death and his acceptance of the Christian philosophy. Thus addressing Death (personified according to familiar convention) he says that it is "slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men", and that it does "with poison, war, and sickness dwell". This side of Donne is sombre and serious.

Picture of morning. But it is only one side. In an earlier song "Busy old fool, unruly sun", he gives us a most brilliant picture of early morning, of *life* in fact. In that poem he pictures the day's first activities of the boys who pass his windows on their way to school or to work, and of the court which was the focal point and symbol of sixteenth century English life ; he strips down the rigours of a time-table ; and he centres his attention on the thought of love. In the whole stanza there is not one word which we would at once think of as "poetic", but several that are apparently not—"fool", "pedantic", "offices", "rags". Yet the effect is exhilarating, for the accumulation of sounds, running over a bouncing rhythm produces a kind of onomatopeia*. We hear the morning by a change of the familiar and disconnected noises into a musical analogy.

Picture of change. Thus for we have seen death, and therefore night, as the end, but also a beginning, and youth and love and sunshine, belonging to the morning, and the morning of life. These are the extremes of life, of which the Elizabethans were particularly aware. Between them lies the action of change. And of this Donne had a particular understanding. So, drawing a powerful image from nature, he wrote in one of his Elegies :

> To live in one land, is captivity,
> To run all countries, a wild roguery ;
> Waters stink soon, if in one place they bide,
> And in the vast sea are more putrefied :
> But when they kiss one bank, and leaving this
> Never look back, but the next bank do kiss,
> Then are they purest ; change is the nursery
> Of music, joy, life, and eternity. (*Elegy III*)

Discussion and argument. A distinctive feature of Donne's poetry is its particular quality of discussion and argument. He disapproved of the smooth, empty sonneteering of those who automatically and effortlessly followed Petrarch, and found the easeful stanzas of the majority of his contemporaries often less than honest.

**onomatopeia*—the sound of words conveying their sense. (It is a poetic device).

Bitterness in love. Haunted by unhappy memories, and troubled by his own inner conflicts between thought and action, he found bitterness and frustration even in love. He loved women and he hated them ; he worshipped them and he spurned them. Before he met Ann More, he had known many, and his experiences are collected in the "Songs and Sonets" :

I can love both fair and brown,
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betrays,
Her who loves loneness best, and her who masks and plays,
Her whom the country form'd, and whom the town,
Her who believes, and her who tries,
Her who still weeps with spongy eyes,
And her who is dry cork, and never cries ;
I can love her, and her, and you and you,
I can love any, so she be not true. (*The Indifferent*)

So Donne gives us a catalogue of types of women, turning, in a parody of Spenserian form, towards a "conceit" in its conclusion. Apart from the sternness of the rhythm, the unexpected introduction of "sponge" and "cork" and the general low tension of the diction, this may pass as almost conventionally Elizabethan. On the other hand in *A Valediction* : *Of Weeping* we find :

On a round ball
A workman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All
So doth each tear,
Which thee doth wear,
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow,
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven
dissolved so.

This has a profundity of thought and feeling which by relation to the image of the universe becomes universal. To treat of love Donne needs all his philosophy, all his knowledge of science and natural history, and geography, to expand his emotions.

Description of external life. We react to the "Songs and Sonets" and feel not only that we have learned more about life in general but, since this is the way the poet speaks, about him also. This is one side of autobiography. The other side relates to the externals. The poet may describe his circumstances and his environment. In his *Satires*, Donne paints a detailed, if critical, picture of the London of his student days—with the "brisk perfumed pert Courtier", the Captain "with forty dead men's pay", the "velvet Justice with a long/Great train of blue coats, twelve, or fourteen strong", and the "monstrous, superstitious puritan", the "plump muddy whore", the apprentices, the school-boys, the elephant and the performing ape. The scene is filled with noise, and the picture is true. Here is a quality which passed from Chaucer, through

Shakespeare and Jonson and Donne, to Defoe and the journalistic, picaresque novel of the 18th century until we meet it again in Dickens and in the characteristic novel and drama of the 20th century.

The Progress of the Soul. In 1601 the Earl of Essex was executed for treason: His friends were shocked and scandalized. Donne wrote a memorial poem, *The Progress of the Soul*. This noble piece, riding on with the majesty of a great hymn, marks a point of division in Donne's life and work. In it the poet dedicates himself anew and finds a new vocation. He says in the first song :

> I sing the progress of a deathless soul
> When Fate, which God made, but doth not control
> Placed in most shapes ; ....

Donne's early poems were of the body, his later ones of the soul In respect of the latter, we must recognize the influence of Sir Philip Sidney whose verse renderings of the Psalms were known to Donne.

Divine poems. The "Divine Poems" of Donne's later years stand among the greatest in the literature of religion. The satire, the flippancy, the effect for effect's sake, which may be found in his earlier secular writing, are put aside. The character of the verse is the same : strong, sculptural, imaginative, and with an irresistible driving force. It is as though the words were orchestrated and painted at the same time. In *Sonnet VII* ("Holy Sonnets") the picture of the Last Day is evoked while the music of the trumpets floods passionately through the text. But Donne also takes in an outmoded notion of an earth with corners :

> At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
> Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise
> From death, you numberless infinities
> Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,.........

The climax of the scene and the procession to the Seat of Judgment are called up by the catalogue built up, word by word—mostly monosyllabic and therefore the more percussive—in the sixth and seventh lines. The last six lines of the sonnet form a separate movement. The colour of the words is altered with Spenserian skill, and the tempo slackens. Donne, as always aware of his own unworthiness, but not beyond a wryly humorous aside, acknowledges his sins and asks for repentance. Characteristically, for even he will depend on his own energy, he asks to be taught how to repent. And at the end the theological dogma concludes what is in effect a sermon.

The label "metaphysical". It has taken almost three centuries for Donne to take his place among the greatest of English poets. The reason for this is that, belonging to no "school"* nor conforming to any particular pattern, he stood too far away from the main stream. The poetic accent of his day was on refinement. Poetry was a diversion, a hobby for the dilettante. Donne was difficult, obscure, individualist. He believed that what he would say should be stated as he wished it to be stated. Samuel Johnson was the first to apply to Donne's the term that has subsequently been employed. Because of Donne's practice of relating the "metaphysical" (that is, those phenomena which lie beyond normal physical experience) to the physical, it was convenient to call him a "metaphysical poet". The term was also applied to some subsequent poets—Abraham Cowley, Richard Crashaw, George Herbert—who followed some part of his style or method.

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*His poetry did, of course lead to the emergence of what has come to be known as the "Metaphysical School".

Donne's poetry has a strong musical quality. But it is of a particular order. Donne is the master of discord. He rode over the conventions to penetrate and to express the deepest feelings.

V

Realism. Donne was not a philosophical poet in the sense of having a coherent philosophy to expound, though he made constant use of philosophical ideas. He did not banish "rhetoric", but inaugurated a new kind of it ; or rather, he carried into the poetry of love the colloquial, dramatic, ironic realism that decorum had reserved for satire. If he fused thought and feeling, he did not always maintain the fusion through even a short poem, but could lapse into logical hair-splitting. He is a much smaller and, in some ways, less complex, poet than Spenser. His technique is exciting but, once grasped, is fairly obvious.

The relations of the body and the soul. Donne was not a mere libertine but a curious explorer of the relations of the body and the soul—his own body and soul—since he has little interest in women's feelings except as they affect his. The question of personal involvement, or of philosophical seriousness, is further complicated by Donne's dramatic method and his varying admixture of wit and levity ; we remember the *Paradoxes and Problems* which devote plausible ingenuity to the support of any unorthodox proposition. One of his tricks is the turning of accepted ideals upside down—as when constancy in love is treated as a vice or heresy. His moods range from the witty defence of promiscuity, or the denial of anything but physical satisfaction, to sober argument for the interrelations of soul and body or for love as a self-sufficient good, the supreme good. On this last level he can be more hyperbolic than even the Petrarchans, but he is convincing through his ironic indirectness, realistic particularity, ratiocination, and explosive force. In *The Sun Rising* the sun which is the great source of light and life merely regulates the workaday world ; the real centre of the real world is the lovers' bed, and their love transcends time. The same theme receives fuller treatment in *The Canonization* : the private world of love reduces bustling careerists to insignificance, and in the quiet conclusion, so different from the violent opening, the ideal lovers are invoked as saints. On a still higher plane of idealism are several poems that Donne presumably addressed to his wife (the two poems just mentioned may also have been addressed to her). The poem "Sweetest love, I do not go" makes it clear that he can, when he wishes, combine tension with tenderness, argument with lyrical melody. *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning* implies a completeness of relationship between man and woman, and between soul and body, that needs no proof ; the images are illustrative rather than argumentative. (The famous conceit or "emblem" of the compasses is more elaborate than typical of Donne's scientific images). And there is complete security, with no hint of doubt or laborious demonstration, in the grand style and sweeping rhythms of *The Anniversary*, in which love conquers both time and death.

Pessimism. Donne's two *Anniversaries*, written nominally in memory of his patron's young daughter, Elizabeth Drury, should be read along with the *Cantos of Mutability*, *Nosce Teipsum*, *The Tears of Peace*, and the *Treaty of Humane Learning*. Like Spenser, Davies, Chapman, and Greville, Donne is, in an age of growing scepticism and confusion, taking stock of the human situation. He differs from the other poets in mind and method and in his keener and fuller knowledge of scientific discoveries and speculations ; a further source of pessimism is the widespread doctrine of the decay of nature and man as the world approaches its dissolution. Donne does not share Chapman's humanistic faith ; he is more akin to the others, especially Greville, in his dark view of fallen, helpless man, his ignorant pretensions to knowledge and his need of grace. Elizabeth Drury, like Christ or the Virgin in Roman Catholic meditations, is the symbol of the perfection that man has lost. True knowledge, true salvation from sin, can be attained only in religion and another life. As usual, Donne expresses general ideas and attitudes through vividly realised particulars. The obverse side of that power—which appears even in his short poems—is inadequate control of tangential details. Although, the *Anniversaries* are deliberately ordered religious exercises, the *First* especially suffers from the difficulties inherent in the symbolism and from awkward articulation of the parts. In the *Second*, Donne moves more freely.

Religious experience. Intellectually, Donne had always been a Christian, but his progress toward certainty was hindered by his sense of Roman Catholic outlawry, his shift to the Church of England, his moral lapses, the worldly disaster of his marriage, and his restless mind. His earlier religious poems, though not without the true accent, were in the main composed in his intellect. Apart from the *Anniversaries*, it was chiefly in the sonnets and several hymns written after his wife's death in 1617 that the intensity of his religious experience found expression. The later, ascetic John Donne has the same sensibility and technique as the earlier Donne : egocentric and dramatic violence, passionate ratiocination, concrete particularity and occasional ugliness of imagery, simplicity of language and complication of idea, ironic wit, and boldly expressive irregularities of rhythm. But now the conflicts and tensions spring from his agonised consciousness of sin, his fear of death and divine justice, his desperate faith in the redeeming sacrifice of Christ. The great Fundamentalist drama is enacted in the poet's intense imagination, and centred in himself. For the lover of women the everyday world had ceased to exist ; now it weighs upon the earth-bound man who cries for salvation. The lover could triumphantly affirm love's conquest of time ; now he faces judgment and eternity—"What if this present were the world's last night ?" The macabre strain that touched even poems of love has full play in the sinner's pre-occupation with death—though in the *Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness* he feels at last something of calm security, and, flat on his bed like a map, can see his "west".

VI

The style and content of his Satires. The poetry of Donne combines violence of personal passion with intellectual ingenuity. His imagery is both starkly realistic and startlingly cunning. In his youth he combined the gaiety and sophistication of a city spark with extensive reading, which partly accounts for the tone of curious wit in much of his early poetry. This poetry, which was not published during his life-time but was circulated to friends in manuscript, consists of five Satires, twenty Elegies, and the "Songs and Sonets". The Satires, written in deliberately rough couplets, have a colloquial vigour combined with a strain of ingenious ratiocination. They give us some vivid glimpses of the London of the period, as well as of Donne's self-arguments about religion :

On a huge hill
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must and about must go,
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so ;
Yet strive so, that before age, death's twilight,
Thy Soul rest, for none can work in that night.
(*Elegy III*)

The Elegies. The Elegies are poems about love, written also in iambic pentameter couplets, dealing with the theme in a great variety of ways. Some are cynical, dealing with the paradoxes and fatuities of lust at work. Some celebrate a clandestine love with an uncomfortable realism. One, *The Autumnal*, is a poem of grave compliment to an older woman apparently of high rank, opening with the well-known lines :

No Spring nor Summer beauty hath such grace
As I have seen in one Autumnal face.

Some are simply exercises in wit. One, the seventeenth, celebrates variety in love. The nineteenth is a clever and lively piece of provocative bawdry, a description of his going to bed with his mistress. But the twelfth and sixteenth are strangely powerful love poems, addressed presumably to his wife when he had to leave her to go on a mission abroad. The sixteenth is characterized by a passionate movement, variations in tempo corresponding to the rise and fall of the emotion. Donne here transmutes the naked experience directly into poetry. He dissuades his wife from her rash plan to follow him abroad disguised as a page : "Be my true mistress still, not my feign'd page". After this appeal he lists the dangers with damning urgency, and the conclusion is equally powerful though in a different way.

Different strains in his love-poems. The "Song and Sonets" are, however, by far the most interesting poems. They are love poems, written at different times, in different moods, and addressed to different persons. Some show the same cynical strain that is found in many of the Elegies, expressed often with ingenious violence and metrical cunning, like the poem "Go and catch a falling star". The way in which some of these poems open shocks the reader into attention, sometimes by means of a question :

> Now thou hast lov'd me one whole day,
> To-morrow, when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say ?
> Wilt thou then antedate some new-made vow ?
> Or say that now
> We are not just those persons which we were ?

First the shock, then the ingenious development of the thought : this is Donne's characteristic method.

This method Donne employs equally in those poems among the "Songs and Sonets" which seem to be addressed not to his casual mistresses but to someone truly and passionately loved, some perhaps to Ann More. Here indeed is that union of passion and ratiocination which has been regarded as Donne's chief quality. Again there is often the opening question, and then the development of the original thought in terms of ideas derived from scholastic philosophy or from new scientific notions :

> I wonder by my troth what thou and I
> Did, till we lov'd ? Were we not weaned till then,
> But suck'd on country pleasures childishly ?
> Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den ?......

The opening, both controversial and startling, projects the reader into the poem in a way that was quite new in English poetry. Once in the poem, the reader is held by the complex development of the thought which, twisted this way and that, serves to embody rather than to cool the passion. True, that often these love poems do not quite maintain the magnificence of their opening : we have the feeling that the emotion itself has carved out the stanza form at the beginning and subsequent stanzas have to be shaped with more deliberation to the form so carved out. But on the whole it is surprising how often the ingenuity echoes in its own way the tremulousness of passion. These poems abound in memorable openings :

(*i*) For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love......

(*ii*) If yet I have not all thy love,
Dear, I shall never have it all.

(*iii*) Twice or thrice had I loved thee
Before I knew thy face or name, ...

(*iv*) Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us ?

There are other kinds of love poems in "Songs and Sonets" besides the cynical and the genuinely passionate. Some, like *A Valediction : Of Weeping* and "Sweetest love I do not go" sound a gentler note of protective tenderness, but again combined with intellectual cunning. Some, such as *Twickenham Garden*, show a more conventional strain of exaggerated compliment, picturing the author as the afflicted lover who is hurt almost to death by the cruelty of his beloved ; these might have been written as poems of compliment to ladies of high rank. *A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day* builds up by every kind of philosophic ingenuity a picture of the poet as reduced to a state of absolute nothingness by the death of the lady who is the subject of the poem. Others again are merely ingenious, sometimes in satiric vein. **In all, the "Songs and Sonets" alone are enough to establish Donne's claim to be considered an original poetic genius of a high order**.

The Progress of the Soul, written in 52 ten-line stanzas, is a strange poem indicative of something of the religious tensions within Donne. His original intention in this poem seems to have been to trace the progress of the soul of the apple, which Eve pulled from its original appearance in Eden, through all the great heretics of history, ending with Queen Elizabeth. He had almost certainly abandoned Roman Catholicism for the Church of England by the time he wrote it, but it shows clear Catholic sympathies. The original plan was modified, and the poem as we have it (not published in Donne's lifetime) carries the soul only as far as Adam's daughter, Themech, "Sister and wife to Cain, that first did plow." This leads to a reflection on the paradox that human progress often springs from the works of bad men, with the conclusion that moral values are relative :

Whoe'er thou beest that read'st this sullen writ,
Which just so much courts thee, as thou dost it,
Let me arrest thy thoughts : wonder with me
Why plowing, building, ruling and the rest
Or most of those arts whence our lives are blest,
By cursed Cain's race invented be,
And blest Seth vexed us with Astronomy.
There's nothing simply good nor ill alone,
Of every quality comparison,
The only measure is, and judge, opinion.

The poem is a "sullen writ" indeed, satirical, extravagant pessimistic.

Donne's **Epigrams** and his **Verse Letters** are less interesting, though two of the verse letters *The Storm* and *The Calm* are sharply etched pictures of the effect of these different conditions at sea on the spirits of the men aboard. The two *Anniversaries*, written as funeral elegies on the 15-year-old daughter of Sir Robert Drury, are elaborately worked out poetic arguments about the decline of the world since the death of the girl, and the discomforts of earthly life. The first, entitled *An Anatomy of the World*, written and published in 1611, broods with many ingenious illustrations over the world's decay and disorder. The second, entitled *The Progress of the Soul**, appeared in the following year, and deals in a similar way with the "incommodities of the soul in this life and her exaltation in the next". It is this second poem which contains the oft-quoted metaphysical description of a blush :

> Her pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought
> That one might almost say, her body thought.

The First Anniversary has the even better-known lines about the conflict between new thought and old values :

> And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
> The element of fire is quite put out ;
> The sun is lost, and th' earth, and no man's wit
> Can well direct him where to look for it
> And freely men confess that this world's spent,
> When in the planets and the firmament
> They seek so many new ; they see that this
> Is crumbled out again to his atomies
> 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone,......

Donne's **Divine Poems** explore traditional devotional attitudes with a new subtlety as well as a startling directness. In the best of these poems the paradoxes of art reflect with anguished intensity the paradoxes involved in man's relation with God. They were written after his wife's death, when Donne had put the worldly and the sensuous life completely behind him and was probing with fierce anxiety for the right relationship with eternity. Sometimes, as in the longer poem in couplets, *Good Friday, Riding Westward* (written in 1613, four years before the death of his wife), the ingenuity of the thought is more striking than the passionate complex of thought and feeling : in this poem the main point is that he is going west, but his thoughts turn east, where Christ was crucified, and he explores the possibilities of this paradox. But even here the conclusion is grave and passionate :

> O think me worth thine anger, punish me,
> Burn off my rusts and my deformity,
> Restore thine image so much by thy grace
> That thou may'st know me, and I'll turn my face.

The nineteen "Holy Sonnets" contain the core of Donne's religious poetry, and most of its finest examples. They include "Batter my heart", "Death be not proud", "At the round earth's imagin'd corners below", and "What if this present were the world's last night ?" Exactly the same combination of passion and argument as is found in the "Songs and Sonets" can be found in these poems (though perhaps the most obviously metaphysical of all Donne's religious poems is not any of the "Holy Sonnets" but the *Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness*). The passion here is, however, more complex ; it is that mixture of hope and anguish that characterizes the religious man searching for the right relationship with God, aware both of his own unworthiness and of God's infinite greatness.

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*Donne had previously written a poem under the same title. The two poems are not to be confused. They deal with different themes.

VII

Innovator. It was necessary in the earlier years of the Donne revival to stress the originality of John Donne the poet, in his rebellion against poetic convention. He was regarded as an innovator, creating a fresh poetic style and form, separating himself from classical inspiration and boldly presenting himself in his self-sufficiency. There was much in what he wrote to encourage and justify this view. In the Epistle introducing *Metempsychosis*, *The Progress of the Soul*, he said, "Now when I begin this book, I have no purpose to come into any man's debt." He would be influenced as little by others as possible. Yet the picture that he has left us of himself noting the Spanish authors in his library and the recollection of his famous phrase on his "hydroptic, immoderate desire of human learning and languages" persuade us that the influence of other writers on him must have been immense. His *Satires*, his earliest writing, were influenced by the realism of Juvenal, and the rugged obscurity of Persius whose fame was revived by Casaubon in Geneva. Ovid influenced the *Elegies*, and Martial the *Paradoxes and Problems**, and *Epigrams*. Occasional references to contemporaries and others show that he read the literature and science of his own times. Modern scholarship has relieved Donne of his splendid isolation and demonstrated that the sources of his inspiration were numerous, and his dependence much greater than had been supposed. It may be that Donne was less ready than others to admit dependence, but probable sources and influences have been suggested for *Metempsychosis*, *The Progress of the Soul*, for *The Ecstasy*, and for the Anniversary poems.

VIII

Donne and Browning. Donne has been called an Elizabethan Browning. His metrical roughness, his obscurities of method, his bewildering allusiveness, his ardent imagination, his taste for metaphysics, and his unexpected divergence into sweet and delightful music, all these characteristics may remind the modern reader of the author of *Sordello*, and "Men and Women". Nor is this comparison without foundation in fact, for Browning was an emphatic admirer of Donne's work, and was influenced by him to no small extent.

**Paradoxes and Problems* is a prose work. It consists of thirteen passages on such subjects as "A Defence of Women's Inconstancy", "That Good is more Common than Evil", "That a Wise Man is known by much Laughing," and "That Virginity is a Virtue".

He had a far keener wit than Browning, though in the excessive voluptuousness of his early work there is no parallel with the virile though reticent passion of the Victorian poet.

Donne's poetry versus Elizabethan verse. One of the most interesting things about Donne is his emphatic revolt from the smooth sweetness of most Elizabethan verse. Although he had the power to utter harmonious and pleasing sounds, he seems to have deliberately adopted a harsh and often staccato method in order to break away from contemporary tradition. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Donne excelled in reflective imagination. The Elizabethan imagination was on the whole a richly observant one; there were scores of writers overflowing with a wealth of perceptive life; but, except in Shakespeare, there is singularly little metaphysical power in the men of the age.

Donne's unfortunate influence. Donne was a most original poet. There were therefore no pronounced literary formative influences in his case and yet he owed much to Spanish literary methods. His work was pretty widely circulated in literary circles, and exercised a great and not very happy influence; for imitators found it far easier to assume his harshness and obscurity, than to display the thought and imagination that render these ingredients tolerable. Jonson, who admired him heartily and not uncritically, predicted that he would perish from not being understood.

Three divisions of Donne's poetry. Donne's poetry falls naturally into three divisions: (*i*) Amorous, (*ii*) Metaphysical, and (*iii*) Satirical. The amorous work includes his earliest verse, and the mingling at times of sensuality and cynical wit reminds us of Byron. His metaphysical and satirical work is greater in quantity, and towards the end of his life he wrote little verse, devoting his powers entirely to homiletical literature. An illustration of the metaphysical may be found in his curious poem, *The Progress of the Soul* (*Metempsychosis*) in which he pursues the vital spark through various transmigrations, including those of a bird and a fish. As an illustration of his satires may be mentioned his fourth satire dealing with the character of a bore. His satires were composed in rhyming couplets on the Latin model, and influenced both Dryden and Pope.

His faults. Donne's very merits tend to deteriorate into faults. The graceful and subtle fancies are worked occasionally to death, and like Browning he has no respect for the reader who cannot follow his keen and incisive thought. His poetry is all the more difficult because of its careless versification and excessive terseness.

IX

Emotional intellectuality. Donne's poems are classic examples of Metaphysical verse. The chief characteristic of Metaphysical writing is its emotional intellectuality. The speaker is always a complex personality, always aware of the involved nature of moral choice and of the ideas current among educated people of his time;

and he has too much respect for his intellectual training and integrity to sacrifice his knowledge for the sake of the excitement of being carried away by his feelings. So, what he knows about his science, about his own weaknesses and needs, about actual human nature, keeps cropping up in his verse, lending it wryness, subtlety, irony, and humour. Wit is essential to writing of this kind, which balances so many diverse elements. Metaphysical poetry is an amalgam of the "pure" poetry of emotional incantation and the analytical poetry of men like Pope and Rochester ; or rather, it represents the attempt of a highly civilized personality to remain true to his basic, instinctive humanity while applying the lessons of science, philosophy, and sophisticated religion to the central problems of his life.

The poet of love and friendship. Donne's poems are largely the uninhibited and curiously annotated record—passionate or ironical, tender or teasing, as the case may be, of many love-affairs before marriage and many life-long friendships. In the former we have an occasional disclosure of ways and means to a desired end—in the earliest poems, mere physical pleasure (or as he calls it, "the sport" : "Let me love none, no, but the sport") ; in the later, a more romantic, more detached longing for a satisfactory sexual relationship. We can only guess which of the "Songs and Sonets" and "Elegies" were written for and about Ann More, whom he courted in secret and with whom he eloped. Of his friendships we know more than enough to prove how constantly he loved and was loved by his friends—Henry Wotton, Christopher and Samuel Brooke (who connived in his run-away marriage and shared imprisonment with him as a result), Henry Goodyer, Robert Drury, the Earl of Dorset, Lucy Bedford, Magdalen Herbert, Elizabeth Huntingdon and others. If he is, as some would maintain, the greatest of English love-poets, he is also outstanding, perhaps, unrivalled, as a poet of friendship (as his many "Verse Letters" "Epithalamions" and "Elegies" show).

X

F.R. Leavis, going through the *Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse*, comes upon Donne's poem *The Good Morrow* and quotes the following startling stanza :

> I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
> Did, till we lov'd ? Were we not wean'd till then ?
> But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly ?
> Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den ?
> 'Twas so ; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
> If ever any beauty I did see,
> Which I desir'd, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

The extraordinary force of originality, says Leavis, made Donne a potent influence in the 17th century. The same force of originality makes Donne seem to us a contemporary poet, a living* poet in the most important sense. And it is not any eccentricity or defiant audacity that makes the effect of the above stanza so immediate, but rather an irresistible rightness.

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*Leavis made these observations forty years ago—in 1936.

In an age when poets were musicians and wrote their lyrics to be sung, Donne used in complete dissociation from music a stanza-form that proclaimed the union of poetry and music. The dissociation is positive ; utterance, movement, and intonation are those of the talking voice. And noteworthy is the way in which the stress is laid on "Did", and the intonation controlled :

> I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
> Did, till we lov'd ?

This is the spirit in which Donne uses the stanza-form—for he does indeed strictly use it : the exigencies of the pattern become means to the inevitable naturalness ; they play an essential part in the consummate control of intonation, gesture, movement, and larger rhythm. But it is now commonly recognized that Donne is a great artist, and we are not likely to hear much more of his harsh and rugged verse and his faults of phrasing and harmony (though no doubt these could still be found). The commonplaces now regard the magnificent handling of the stanza, the building-up of varied cumulative effects within it, exemplified by, say, *The Anniversary* and *A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day.*

Something may be said about such mastery of tone as is exhibited, say, in *Air and Angels*—the passage from the gravely gallant and conventional exaltation of the opening to the blandly insolent matter-of-factness of the close. Indeed, the subtleties of Donne's use of the speaking voice and the spoken language are inexhaustible. His verse—the technique, the spirit in which the sinew and living nerve of English are used—suggests an appropriate development that his ear might have recorded in the theatre.

And there is, of course, about Donne's characteristic poetry—in the presentment of situations, the liveliness of enactment—something fairly to be called dramatic. *Satire III* very obviously justifies the adjective (though not, perhaps, more obviously than many of the poems in stanzas), and the handling in it of the decasyllabic line reminds us peculiarly of dramatic blank verse. Noteworthy, for instance, is the way in which Donne here, playing his sense-movement across the rhymes, controls his tone and gets his key-stresses, coming finally down with retarded emphasis on "damned" :

> Are not heaven's joys as valiant to assuage
> Lusts, as earth's honour was to them ? Alas,
> As we do them in means, shall they surpass
> Us in the end, and shall thy father's spirit
> Meet blind philosophers in heaven, whose merit
> Of strict life may be imputed faith, and hear
> Thee, whom he taught so easy ways and near
> To follow, damn'd ?

This art has evident affinities with Shakespeare's. Nevertheless Donne is writing something original and quite different from blank verse. For all their apparent casualness, the rhymes are strictly *used* ; the couplet-structure, though not in Pope's way, is functional.

Leavis then quotes another passage from the same *Satire* (Careless Phrygius doth abhor.........ness too much light breeds") to show the mimetic flexibility for which the whole poem is remarkable. The poised logical deliberation of the first three lines (of the second passage quoted), suggesting the voice of invincibly rational caution, sets off the rakish levity, the bland Restoration insolence, that follows : "So doth, so is......" All this shows how dramatic Donne's use of his medium can be ; how subtly, in a consummately managed verse, he can exploit the strength of spoken English. The matter does not, however, end there.

A Donne whose art was fully represented by *Satire* III could not have been as important or pervasive an influence in the century as actually he was. He also wrote this :

Sweetest love, I do not go
For weariness of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter Love for me ;
But since that I
Must die at last, 'tis best,
To use my self in jest
Thus by feign'd deaths to die.

This is written by Donne, and yet it is a song. And Donne's songs are, through a continuity of intermediate modes, in touch at the other end of the scale with the mode of *Satire III*.

7

Emile Legouis on the Poetry of Donne

John Donne is perhaps the most singular of English poets. His poems offer examples of everything condemned by classical writers as bad taste and eccentricity, all pushed to an extreme.

Revolt against Petrarchanism. At the outset of Donne's career, Spenser had already won fame, and the Petrarchian* sonneteers were producing collection upon collection. Donne reacted against these modes of writing. He found pastoral poetry, mythology, the allegory, Platonism, the taste for platitudes and for copious and facile description to be the vogue. He despised convention and the morals of chivalry ; and he despised highly regular metres and monotonous and harmonious cadences. His friend and admirer, Ben Jonson, said of him that he esteemed him "the first poet in the world for some things", but also that "Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging." This offence, for such it is, is the result of his subordination of melody to meaning, his refusal to submit to the reigning hierarchy of words, and sometimes of his use of the expressive spoken language, in defiance of the convention of poetic rhythm. He introduces into rhymed verse such bold innovations as were customary in the blank verse of the dramatists :

> When thou knew'st *what* I dreamt, when thou knew'st *when*.

To smoothly flowing lines he often prefers those, freely divided, in which the accents have an effect of shock, pull the reader up and awaken his attention.

Wit, hyperbole, subtlety. Donne discards the easy and familiar, the mythological imagery. He turns out the company of gods and goddesses and rejects allusions to Greek and Latin poetry. In avoiding the commonplace he goes to the extreme of adopting a cult of the eccentric. At the risk of being enigmatic, he takes pleasure only in the subtle. His sonnets, often such not in structure but merely in name, are akin by their subtlety to the most subtle of those which Shakespeare was writing at this time, but go far beyond them in this quality. Passion, feeling, sensuality : all are subjected to wit. This play of wit sometimes results in astounding hyperbole : Donne excuses himself for mistaking his mistress for an angel on the ground that to imagine her as being anything else would be profane. Or he incongruously brings together ideas remote from each other, mingling the lofty and the mean, the sublime and the trivial. He draws every kind of inference from the fact that a flea hops from biting him to suck his mistress's blood. He will not let her kill this creature in which their blood has mingled, and which is therefore their bridal bed, the temple of their wedding.

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* **"Petrarchian" or "Petrarchan"—both these forms are correct.**

Anticipates Browning. In such passages Donne descends to the ridiculous, or rather he is saved from such a descent by his feeling that he is playing with his theme and his amusement at his own extravagance. More often the fantastic is combined in him with passion, a strange compound, and he writes short, disconcerting, unique poems, some with a dramatic turn, which anticipate Browning two centuries in advance. He suggests scenes ; bit by bit, by means of scattered indications of surroundings, movements and gestures, a scene is half discerned. *The Dream* is such a poem.

He has sudden impulses of thought, as in the opening lines of *The Good Morrow* :

> I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
> Did, till we lov'd ?

At the beginning of *The Canonization* this abruptness is mingled with a piquant discourtesy to a friend who would stop him from loving :

> For God's sake, hold your tongue, and let me love.

No lofty cult of woman. The Petrarchians had a lofty cult of woman. Donne generally rejects this cult, and is highly ironical in speaking of women. His *Elegies* realistically relate more than one nocturnal adventure. The women to whom he writes his first verses are without virtue or faith. When a woman seems worthy to inspire a passion, he holds Platonic love to be a lure, or seeks, with subtle sophistry, to change it to its contrary. He employs insidious arguments to persuade his love to give herself to him entirely. His most beautiful poem is perhaps *The Ecstasy*, in which, when he has long adored his beloved, dumb and motionless, their hands and eyes meeting, he begs that their passion may have its physical consummation. Their two hearts are melted into one. They feel that they have become pure spirits. From this height, the body matters little. Poor body, which yet deserves its reward for having brought them together !

Death in his love-poems. Although Donne's love is always deeply sensuous, it is sometimes expressed with singular force and grandeur. The thought of death ennobles it. In *The Anniversary*, he sees it persisting even in the grave. In *The Relique*, he imagines himself dead and beneath the soil. His grave is opened to admit the body of another and on his wrist the grave-digger finds 'a bracelet of bright hair about the bone." Henceforth both of them, because of their great love, will be honoured like saints : "All women shall adore us, and some men."

The title "metaphysical". Thus everything in Donne's early poems is in revolt against the poetic canons of the age. Their wit is indeed by itself not enough. Wit—and conceits—abound in Sidney and in Shakespeare. But in them they are an ornament, an occasional grace. In Donne, wit is everywhere. It is his very genius, and fashions his feeling and his thought. He is over-weighted with allusions to philosophical doctrines, even scholastic philosophy in which he was expert, and to contemporary science, even of the most abstruse description. His muse loves those sudden flights from the material to the spiritual sphere for which Dryden gave him, and Dr. Johnson confirmed to him, the title of "metaphysical". He deserves it also for his obscurity, which is sometimes terrible. He is again like Browning because the very difficulty in reading him has counted for something in his success, because it became a point of vanity to be subtle enough to apprehend his subtlety, to have enough mental agility to follow his somersaults.

His religious poetry. These secular poems which have briefly been considered above are the best of his work. He also wrote religious poetry. But the religious poems differ from the secular ones only in theme ; their spirit is the same. He is at his best in short pieces. In his longer, more ambitious poems, like *The Anatomy of the World*, and *Of the Progress of the Soul* (also called *The First Anniversary* and *The Second Anniversary*), he is almost unbearable, in spite of the fact that these verses are illumined by stray lightning flashes. He was made for surprises and rapid flights, and had neither the constructive nor the staying power which could keep him long in the flight. Moreover, such quintessence of the fantastic is intolerable except in small doses.

Refines thought. Like his contemporaries, Gongora in Spain, and Marino in Italy, Donne carried a characteristic of the Renais- sance to the extreme. His poetry, otherwise very distinct from theirs, has in common with it an exaggerated subtlety, but while their refinement was especially one of style and manner, he refines thought.

His Satires. Donne composed his first satires as early as 1593. He was at that time writing satirical and erotic poetry in turns. By reason of his extreme youth he could not be a very profound moralist, and his satires were mainly literary exercises in which, however, his originality and his fantastic bent were already apparent. He desired to restore to the satire the rude versification used by the Romans. A taste for the obscure led him to prefer Persius, who is his favourite model.

Versification in the Satires. Never has the English heroic metre suffered as at Donne's hands. He wrote so-called couplets, but allowed himself to drag the sense from one line to the next in the most violent manner and to make the most singular divisions of his line. More than this, he violates the iambic rhythm over and over again and many of his lines cannot be scanned :

If all things be in all,
As I think, since all which were, are and shall
Be, be made of the same elements,
Each thing each thing implies or represents.

When he rhymes unaccented syllables, the fact may be attributed to archaism but with little probability, since he aimed at modernism and a reproduction of the inflections of everyday speech. It is rather that he despised the laws of versification.

Subjects of the Satires. As for his subjects, they are traditional but reanimated by observation and by something pointed and unexpected in the way they are handled. He resumes Horace's theme of the bore and that of the snob who disturbs the poet at his books and drags him out into the street where repeatedly he leaves him in order to greet some important personage.

The poet's subtle and metaphysical imagination was already finding vent, as in the satire which exposes the wretchedness of courtiers and litigants. Magistrates are the sea in which all streams lose themselves, and litigants are the streams which feed that sea. The queen can do nothing in the matter : she is like the calm source of the Thames, ignorant who owns the meadows or the corn-fields flooded by its waters :

O age of rusty iron : Some better wit
Call it some worse name, if ought equal it,
The iron age was, when justice was sold ; now
Injustice is sold dearer.

(*Satire V*)

8

The Satires of Donne

Donne's five Satires were probably written during the years 1593—1598. They are thus among his earliest poems. They are modelled in style and technique on Persius* and, like Roman satire, are thoroughly metropolitan in spirit.

Analysis of individual Satires. In *Satire I* ("Away thou fondling motley humorist") Donne describes how he was persuaded to leave his books and take a walk with a foolish companion. The companion, after smiling at "every fine silken painted fool", left him, first for a celebrated tobacco-smoker, then for a celebrated judge of clothes, and finally for his mistress, in whose house he quarrelled with other gallants and was turned out of doors with a broken head. In this Satire, realistic detail predominates over mere wit. Lines 37—48 could have been written only by Donne. In these lines he insists on his companion's inconsistency and absurdity in hating naked virtue although he loves his naked whore, and although souls only enter into felicity when they are naked of bodies, and although man was naked in the state of innocence. The argument is based, of course, on a deliberate confusion between the metaphorical and literal meaning of "naked". The poem is much more dramatic than most Elizabethan satires, which generally contain mere description and denunciation. The amount of action and dialogue in the following passage is, for instance, noteworthy :

> Now leaps he upright, jogs me, and cries, Do you see
> Yonder well-favoured youth ? Which ? Oh 'tis he
> That dances so divinely ; Oh, said I,
> Stand still, must you dance here for company ?
> He droopt, we went,................................
> ....
> So is the Pox.

Satire II ("Sir ; though (I thank God for it) I do hate") ridicules poets and lawyers. It is much less individual and characteristic, and much closer to the general run of Elizabethan satires. Poets who starve themselves by writing for idiotic actors, who "write to Lords, rewards to get", who plagiarize—these, says Donne, like other monstrous sinners (lechers, usurers, drunkards, swearers), do not trouble him, for they punish themselves. But he cannot tolerate Coscus (the

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***Persius** : Roman satirist (A.D. 34—62), author of six satires, inculcating the stoic moral doctrine.**

author of the anonymous sonnet-sequence *Zepheria*), who is so proud of being a lawyer that he courts a woman in the language of law. Then, by a very abrupt and obscure transition, Donne proceeds to satirize men who take up the practice of law for mere gain, and who, combining law with usury, cheat prodigal heirs out of their estates.

Satire III ("Kind pity chokes my spleen......") deals with the search for true religion. Here Donne is truly inspired by his subject, and this poem seems wholly to have engaged Donne's personal feelings. Here he is not merely witty, but passionately witty, or wittily passionate. The poem gives us an unforgettable picture of an eager mind at work. Truth, says Donne, is a little older than falsehood ; thus the true religion is that which is nearest to the Primitive Church. Truth is to be attained by a careful comparison of rival arguments about a matter of fact : the question to be decided being which church is, as a matter of fact, nearest to the Primitive Church ? And faith, in this context, consists in the belief that a really thorough and disinterested research will discover this factual truth. Some seek truth at Rome, because she was there a thousand years ago, others at Geneva, others at home, while some are content to suppose that all religions are the same. It is in this poem that there occur those famous lines on truth :

On a huge hill,
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must, and about must go ;
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so ;
Yet strive so, that before age, death's twilight,
Thy soul rest, for none can work in that night.

(In these lines, according to a critic, Donne is "at his absolute best as a poetic craftsman").

The following comment on *Satire III* is noteworthy : "The modernity of the controversy between God's word and its differing interpretations makes the third satire the most readable and interesting of the five, and the most important in any study of Donne. Its homogeneity, its lucidity and its objectivity, and also its lack of sensationalism make it far less Juvenalian, far less of a 'farrago'*, than, say, the first two satires, which run more to type".

The subject of *Satire IV* ("Well ; I may now receive, and die") is the Court and Courtiers. It is the longest of Donne's satires ; it is the roughest in versification ; and, on the whole, it is the least interesting. Donne describes how, at the Court, he was unable to escape the attentions of an absurdly dressed person who pretended to be a great traveller, linguist, and repository of secrets. Having got rid of him, Donne went home and reflected on the folly and futility of those whom he had seen at the Court. There is no clear plan or dominant idea in this Satire ; detail is piled on detail. Individual lines are striking but they do not combine to produce a whole. Here is a specimen of some excellent writing in this poem. A spruce man approaches a woman who scarcely knows him :

**farrago*—hotch-potch ; medley.

> And unto her protests, protests, protests,
> So much as at Rome would serve to have thrown
> Ten Cardinals into the Inquisition ;
> And whispered by Jesu, so often, that a
> Pursuivant would have ravish'd him away
> For saying of our Lady's psalter.

Satire V deals with suitors and law officers. Here, it seems, the particular evil which Donne satirizes serves merely as a topic for the display of his wit. Almost the whole point of the following passage turns on the exploitation of the double meaning of the word "angel" :

> Judges are gods ; he who made and said them so
> Meant not that men should be forc'd to them to go,
> By means of Angels ; when supplications
> We send to God, to Dominations,
> Powers, Cherubins, and all heaven's Courts, if we
> Should pay fees as here, daily bread would be
> Scarce to kings.

General characteristics. It is only in Satire III, on the search for true religion, that Donne is consistently inspired by the subject in itself ; and there, too, he writes with a considerable moral earnestness. In the other satires there are many touches of vivid realism, but there is not much that is not very different from the general run of Elizabethan satire. What is characteristic of Donne in these satires is the dramatic quality which strikes us in *Satire I* and merriment for its own sake which is especially noticeable in *Satire V*. Donne's condemnations of lawyers, suitors, and courtiers, though originally and forcefully expressed, are yet conventionally derived. On the whole, Donne's satires are very uneven. We are often attracted by a fine and just observation, a clever example, a memorable phrase ; and then suddenly we find that we have lost the line of the often difficult argument, and are becoming bored. His satires were greatly admired in his own day (by those to whom they were circulated) and indeed they are amazingly vigorous and effective. Donne put much more into satire than any English writer did before him, and in any history of English verse his satires would have to be described as a landmark.

9

The Songs and Sonets

Donne's fame as a love-poet rests principally on the "Songs and Sonets" consisting of fiftyfive secular lyrics in various metres. An eminent critic thus classifies the poems which make up the collection called "Songs and Sonets'

1. Ten deliberately outrageous, paradoxical, or cynical poems in which Donne is mainly concerned to excite admiration and astonishment by a display of wit : (*i*). "Go and catch a falling star" ; (*ii*) *Woman's Constancy* ; (*iii*) *The Indifferent* ; (*iv*) *Love's Usury* ; (*v*) *Community* ; (*vi*) *Confined Love* ; (*vii*) *Love's Alchemy* ; (*viii*) *The Curse* ; (*ix*) *The Apparition* ; (*x*) *Love's Diet*. There is something very energetic and dramatically convincing about most of these poems.

2. Five merely witty and ingenious poems about love, not outrageous or cynical or bitter, but far less spirited and energetic than those mentioned above. These are (*i*) *The Flea*: (*ii*) *A Jeat Ring Sent* ; (*iii*) *The Triple Fool* ; (*iv*) *A Valediction : Of my Name in the Window* ; and (*v*) *Witchcraft by a Picture*.

3. Four songs "which were made to certain airs" : (*i*) *The Bait* ; (*ii*) "Sweetest love, I do not go ; (*iii*) *The Message* ("Send home my long-strayed eyes to me") ; and (*iv*) *Break of Day*.

4. Eight poems almost certainly written during Donne's middle years and perhaps addressed to Mrs. Herbert or the Countess of Bedford : (*i*) *The Undertaking* ; (*ii*) *The Will* ; (*iii*) *The Funeral* ; (*iv*) *The Blossom* ; (*v*) *The Primrose* ; (*vi*) *The Relic* ; (*vii*) *The Damp* ; and (*viii*) *Twickenham Garden*.

5. Three poems which are witty rather than impassioned, and two of which return to that theme of woman's inconstancy which plays so great a part in the more outrageous poems. These poems are, nevertheless, tender and playful rather than cynical : (*i*) *The Legacy* ; (*ii*) *Love's Deity* ; and (*iii*) *Love's Exchange*.

6. Twenty poems which are, as a group, more serious, more impassioned, more tender, more personal and less detached than the rest. Some of these were at least partly inspired by Ann More : (*i*) *The Good Morrow* ; (*ii*) *The Sun Rising* ; (*iii*) *The Canonization* ; (*iv*) *Lovers' Infiniteness* ; (*v*) *A Fever* ; (*vi*) *Air and Angels* ; (*vii*) *The Anniversary* ; (*viii*) *A Valediction : Of the Book* ; (*ix*) *The*

Dream ; (*x*) *A Valediction* : ***Of Weeping*** ; (*xi*) *A Nocturnal upon **St. Lucy's Day*** ; (*xii*) ***The Broken Heart*** ; (*xiii*) *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning* ; (*xiv*) ***The Dissolution*** ; (*xv*) *The Prohibition* ; (*xvi*) *The Expiration* ; (*xvii*) ***The Computation*** ; (*xviii*) *The Paradox* ; (*ixx*) *A Lecture upon **the Shadow*** ; and (*xx*) ***The Token***.

7. Finally, there are four poems which may be described as serious analyses of love, as distinct from merely witty or paradoxical generalizations upon it : (*i*) ***Farewell to Love*** ; (*ii*) *Negative Love* ; (*iii*) *Love's Growth* ; and (*iv*) ***The Ecstasy***.

General characteristics. As regards the characteristics of the poems in this Collection, the same critic says : "I should insist first of all upon their wit, that wit which may be roughly defined as the development in logical form of general propositions or statements, often paradoxical, preposterous or hyperbolical, and the reinforcement and illustration of them by means of ingenious analogies. I should insist, in the second place, on their dramatic quality, their dramatization of actual or imaginary experiences, situations, attitudes ; thirdly, on their logical construction, the untransposability of their lines and stanzas ; and, lastly, on their colloquial diction, their approximation to "language such as men do use", together with their deliberate rejection of conventional ornamentation, of classical, mythological, and, in general, of all merely literary allusions."

The wonderful "Songs and Sonets"—fiftyfive uncut gems as unique, in their different way, as Browning's fifty "Men and Women" —raise inevitable questions about the literary integrity of the author. The first of these poems, ***The Good Morrow***, lauds pagan love as the be-all and end-all of existence. The next two "Go and catch a falling star" and ***Woman's Constancy***, are as grossly cynical as they are brilliant in wit. The fourth, ***The Undertaking***, is a Paul-and-Virginia pastel. The fifth, ***The Sun Rising***, returns magnificently to amorous paganism ; and the next is ***The Indifferent*** with its severe motto : "I can love ***any***, so she be not true." No theory of dramatic purpose or different dates will account for this emotional welter. Donne was the sort of man whose purest depths could not be with its without bringing up also a good deal of obscenity and inconsequence. They are all dumped together, often in the same poem, as in ***The Relic***, which opens with two solemn lines :

> When my grave is broke up again,
> Some second guest to entertain ;

then plunges into the mire in a parenthesis,

> (For graves have learn'd that womanhood
> To be to more than one a bed)

and at once mounts to the zenith :

> And he that digs it, spies
> A bracelet of bright hair about the bone.

In the third (and last) stanza the poet moralizes :

> First, we lov'd well and faithfully,
> Yet knew not what we lov'd, nor why,
> Difference of sex no more we knew
> Than our guardian angels do.

This innocence does not sit well.

Not necessarily biographical. A few of the "Songs and Sonets"*, such as *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*, have been linked to actual events and people in Donne's life, but the majority of them should be regarded as expressions of moments of intense emotional activity inside the poet's mind ; in other words, their only correspondence to reality is to inner reality, not to any concrete biographical facts. Although the poems deal with the subject of love, we need not search for the source of their inspiration in actual persons. Some, by their tenderness and unusual gentleness, may be helpfully associated with one particular woman, the poet's wife. The tone of one or two others suggests that they were addressed to Lucy, Countess of Bedford, as elaborate, half-serious "test-pieces". But the majority are literary experiments, explorations of the love-relationship from the man's point of view. Each of these should be read as a poem complete in itself, independent of the poet's biography. No poem of any merit should depend on anything but itself.

The dates of these poems. The order of the poems in the published editions is not chronological, and it is unlikely that their dates will ever be determined, Not all of them belong to the fifteen-nineties, though the majority probably do. Some of them indeed can confidently be dated after 1598—several of these because they seem to be related to the period of Donne's courtship and marriage. Others are evidently, from their darker mood and more profound harmonies, even later : one at least seems to have been inspired by sorrow at the death of his wife.

Metrical variety. Metrically, the poems show great variety and originality. They are all in different metres. The stanza forms are of Donne's own invention, repeated neither by himself nor by any later poet. But although the individual metres are many, they all share the same quality of metric, produce the same kind of metrical effect, and spring from the same attitude to metre. This quality, this effect, this attitude, are not paralleled in the works of any earlier poet. The metre is part of the fused whole, not something superadded. The very pauses are like the pauses between phrases in music : they are as important as the phrases themselves.

Variety of moods. Each poem in the "Songs and Sonets" captures a unique mood though, may be, a mood only slightly different from that captured in a poem on a similar theme—just as Cezanne* spent hours, under a changing light, painting the same tree for the valid reason that one tree was after all very like another and that what mattered, and what altered, was the tree's relationship with that changing light, the angles from which it could be painted, and the changing moods these changing relationships produced in the sensibility of the artist who tried to set them down. What the tree was to Cezanne, love was to Donne. Sometimes he sees the tormented artist at rest in a mystical immortality, and the loved one as the very soul of the world :

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*The word "Sonet" is derived from "Sonata", and was applied to any short poem that could be set to music. This word is quite different from the word "Sonnet".

> But yet thou canst not die, I know ;
> To leave this world behind, is death,
> But when thou from this world wilt go,
> The whole world vapours with thy breath.
> Or if, when thou, the world's soul goest,
> It stay, 'tis but thy carcass then...... (*A Fever*)

Sometimes it is the concrete components and manifestations of love which he analyses ; especially the tears of love, and the hearts of lovers. In *Lovers' Infiniteness*, one of his most beautiful and gentle poems,

> If yet I have not all thy love,
> Dear, I shall never have it all,

he transmutes metaphysical speculations on the meanings of the phrase "all thy love" into a most musical and extraordinarily *easy* and lucid song.

***Paul Cezanne (1839—1906) was a French painter, one of the chief masters of the Modern French School. He was associated with the movement known as Post-Impressionism.**

10

The Elegies of Donne

General characteristics. Donne wrote twenty poems which have been described as elegies*. They are varied in depth and content, though they are all written in couplets. (The two *Anniversaries*, the Satires, and most of the verse letters of Donne are also written in couplets). A glance at the titles of these elegies would indicate the nature of their themes : *Jealousy, The Anagram, Change, The Perfume, His Picture, On His Mistress, Variety, Going to Bed, Love's Progress, Love's War*. They are characterized by vigour, concrete imagery, and a set of psychological attitudes (found also in some of the more cynical of the "Songs and Sonets"). A few of these twenty elegies may here be examined.

Elegy I (*Jealousy*). The argument which the lover here employs may thus be stated : "Your husband is jealous of us ; so we should be grateful and kind to the poor old fellow for warning us to be careful. From now on we shall not kiss and play in his house, but in another house". This theme is worked out through a metaphysical analogy which runs thus :" Silly woman, why do you look so sad if your husband is jealous ? If he were dying, you would not weep, but feel merry. So why weep now, when you find him killing himself with jealousy ? The condition in which he is should mean as happy a release for you as would his actual death."

Elegy IV (*The Perfume*). The mistress here is a young unmarried woman, a mere girl to whom the poet secretly makes love. The girl has a suspicious, bed-ridden mother ; and a suspicious, violent, coarse, and drunken father, who employs a giant-like servant to keep watch over her. The poet is frankly interested in the wealth the girl will inherit at her father's death. What gives the poet away is a strong perfume ; and after describing the lover's successful evasion of both parents and the servant, he ends with a bitter denunciation of perfumes in general, and a wish that the girl's father should soon die :

> All my perfumes, I give most willingly
> To embalm thy father's corpse ; What ? Will he die ?

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*The label "Elegies" has been used in a loose sense. Originally, and properly speaking, an elegy meant a funeral poem or a poem of mourning. But Ovid and other Roman poets used the word to describe a love-poem (written in couplets consisting of a hexameter followed by a pentameter). In the case of Donne the word "elegy" is used in this latter sense, but the meter used here is the iambic pentameter couplet.

The situation in the poem is brilliantly, vividly, and concentratedly imagined. The atmosphere is one of close excitement and intrigue, and the poem has a strongly dramatic quality, besides a grim, savage humour. The element of high-spirited, rollicking exaggeration is also noteworthy.

Elegy V (*His Picture*). This poem seems to have been written before Donne's departure with the Cadiz expedition in June 1596. From the poem we can infer absolutely nothing about the woman to whom it is addressed—whether she was married or single, whether, even, she was real or imaginary. She may well have been composite. Even if Donne did not have a particular woman in mind at the time, to write a farewell to his mistress would have been dramatically appropriate to the situation of one departing on a military expedition (and Donne was a born self-dramatizer). In short, the poet here takes a witty but not un-tender farewell of some unknown mistress before departing on his expedition. Let his portrait, he says, remined her after he returns broken and weather-beaten, what he was like when she first loved him. But let her not scorn him for his coarse appearance, because their love by then should be strong enough to disregard external attractions. The dramatic quality of this poem, too, is noteworthy.

Elegy IX (*The Autumnal*). It is one of the best of those elegies which fall into the tradition of poems for patrons. In this poem, Donne tells us, affection takes reverence's name. It was addressed to Mrs. Magdalen Herbert (when she was a widow). It is the period between the ages of thirty-five and fifty in a woman's life, which we should expect Donne to call "autumnal". He expressly denies, after all, in this Elegy any affection for extreme old age. It is a characteristic metaphysical poem of Donne, thoroughly secular in style. In its wit and its tenderness it is a "fashionable" poem, such as Donne could not have written in his last years.

Elegy XII (*His Parting from Her*). Like the other elegies, this too is a dramatic monologue. The subject of separation from a mistress always inspires Donne to his most intense and impassioned writing. No other poet has expressed so feelingly, in tone, language, and even rhythm, the pangs of separation. This elegy is different, in mood, tone and attitude from the rough, juvenile Elegy I. The opening is in a dark key :

> Since she must go, and I must mourn, come Night,
> Environ me with darkness, whilst I write :

The standpoint here, as in Elegy I, is that of the adulterous lover ; but now the lover speaks with a passion and purpose that increases as the poem moves on :

> Was't not enough, that thou didst hazard us
> To paths in love so dark, so dangerous :
> And those so ambush'd round with household spies,
> And over all thy husband's towering eyes
> That flam'd with oily sweat of jealousy ?

It is much the same situation as in Elegy I : the last line quoted above, indeed, speaks the same resentful, contemptuous language. But the husband here is taken more seriously, with his "towering eyes". The poet has intensified his material, perhaps out of some further experience. The jealous husband is no mere figure of a farce, but a serious element in a situation considerably felt by the poet. The poet, here, swears eternal love in some of the finest closing lines to be found anywhere in Donne. The elemental imagery in these lines gives solemnity and permanence to a situation more often expressed on a lower level. There is one passage ("I will not look upon the quickening sun, ...And Autumn, what our golden harvests were") which is a good example of how Donne uses natural description (elements, seasons, etc.) to illuminate some aspect of man (or woman) : he is rarely interested in natural phenomena for their own sake.

Elegy XVI (*On His Mistress*). This poem has often been regarded as autobiographical. It would seem that Donne was here addressing his wife, Ann More. He was about to cross the continent for Italy, and it was suggested that she might accompany him in the guise of a page. Donne appeals to her, in the name of all their past love, not to accompany him ; it would be madness to risk her life. The French would recognize her as a woman and would assault her ; the Italians would make love to her even though they thought her a boy. None would attack her if she remained in England :

Men of France, changeable chameleons,
Spitals of diseases, shops of fashions,
Love's fuellers, and the rightest company
Of Players, which upon the world's stage be,
Will quickly know thee, and no less, alas !
Th' indifferent Italian, as we pass
His warm land, well content to think thee Page,
Will hunt thee with such lust, and hideous rage,
As Lot's* fair guests were vex'd. But none of these
Nor spongy hydroptic† Dutch shall thee displease,
If thou stay here.

Of this passage an eminent critic writes : "The whole of these central lines reveal that strange bad taste, some radical want of delicacy which mars not only Donne's poems and lighter prose but even at times the sermons." Donne ends the poem by urging his wife to stay in England and not to tempt fate by imagining him in danger. The personal tone of the poem, and certain details probably the result of actual experience, make it much more than a literary exercise on a set theme. We cannot help being moved by the slow, serious opening lines :

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*Lot was a patriarch whose life in Sodom is described in the Bible (Genesis). Sodom was a city of unnatural vice. The word "sodomy" is derived from that city's name.

†*hydroptic*—drunken.

By our first strange and fatal interview,
By all desires which thereof did ensue,
By our long starving hopes......

Equally remarkable is the vivid, realistic glimpse into the future as the mistress's fears imagine it, when the poet entreats her not to feel scared when he is away.

Elegy XIX (*To His Mistress Going to Bed*). This is the most candid of Donne's elegies. The poem is "a piece of frank naturalism redeemed from coarseness by passion and poetic completeness". It is addressed by the poet to his mistress and is a fine piece of wit-writing. The poet urges his mistress to undress herself completely. He asks her to take off her girdle which encloses a lovely world (that is, her body), to unpin her breast plate, to unlace herself, to remove her busk (*i.e.*, corset). Her gown, when taken off, reveals an extremely "beauteous state". Let her take off her "wiry coronet" and her shoes, and then creep into his soft bed. She is an angel who brings into the bed a heaven like "Mahomet's Paradise". He then wants her permission (or a licence from her) to fondle every part of her body. She is his America (a newly discovered land), his kingdom, his empire :

Licence my roving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America ! my new-found land,
My mine of precious stones, my Empery,
How blest am I in this discovering thee !

He wants her to strip herself completely because a complete enjoyment of love is possible only when the bodies are absolutely naked :

Full nakedness ! All joys are due to thee,
As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be,
To taste whole joys.

He urges her to show herself "liberally" to him as she might to a midwife. He sets an example by discarding all his own clothes and wants her to follow suit :

To teach thee, I am naked first ; why then
What needst thou have more covering than a man.

It is a delectable poem except for readers who are prudish and strait-laced.

According to a critic, the most pervasive quality in these elegies is the colloquial vigour of the language, together with the absence of classical allusions, traditional ornaments, and, generally speaking, of anything obviously "poetical". Then there is the dramatic element, apparent not only in the devising of imaginary situations*, but in the rhythms and inflexions of the verse. Colloquial, dramatic, argumentative, impudent, paradoxical, dialectical, ingenious—the Donne of the Elegies is all these things. But whatever else he may be, he is all the time witty in these poems.

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*All the situations are not imaginary. Most of them may be based on Donne's personal experiences.

11

Poems Occasioned by Elizabeth Drury's Death

I. A Funeral Elegy

II. An Anatomy of the World (*"The First Anniversary"*. Wherein, By Occasion of the Untimely Death of Mistress Elizabeth Drury, the Frailty and the Decay of this Whole World is Represented.

III. The Progress of the Soul (*"The Second Anniversary"*). Wherein, By Occasion of the Religious Death of Mistress Elizabeth Drury, the Incommodities of the Soul in this Life, and Her Exaltation in the Next, are Contemplated.

In the year 1610, Elizabeth Drury, the only child and heiress of Sir Robert and Lady Drury, died at the age of fifteen. Sir Robert was a man of great wealth, and he had high ambitions for his daughter. In her honour, Donne composed *A Funeral Elegy*, even though he had never met the girl.

1. **A Funeral Elegy**. The tomb, says Donne in the *Elegy*, must not have the last word, not even this splendid tomb erected in her memory by her grief-stricken parents. Nothing, however splendid, can compensate for her. The most expensive materials cannot be compared to her. The present elegy is like a mere wrapping of her in paper. But verse will serve to keep her memory alive as long as this world lasts, which will not be long, "for her death wounded" the world. Poets have their contribution to make, no less than princes, counsellors, lawyers, divines, and the rest. Death has won a notable triumpth over her, and will proceed to further victory, over the world itself. Nothing else is left, for she was unequalled and the death of another individual would be no greater victory :

> For since death will proceed to triumph still,
> He can find nothing, after her, to kill,
> Except the world itself, so great as she.

Death is not the last, not the right word : a timepiece, though lying in pieces, can be reassembled. Yet the loss is real, and we had best accept it by remembering her, as now we do, recalling her in her youthful virginity, and believing that all subsequent human virtue completes her unfinished life :

For future virtuous deeds are Legacies,
Which from the gift of her example rise ;
And 'tis in heav'n part of spiritual mirth,
To see how well the good play her, on earth.

Sir Robert must naturally have approved of Donne's tribute to his daughter, and Donne was encouraged thereby to undertake a more considerable poem. Lines 84—102 of this elegy refer to the book of destiny ; "Fellow-Commissioner with Destiny", and remind us of the beginning of *Metempsychosis, the Progress of the Soul*, especially stanzas I and IV.

The Two Anniversaries. The writing of this brief elegy stirred in Donne a recollection of his uncompleted epic, and aroused a desire to try once again to write a poem of such proportions. Accordingly, soon afterwards, he wrote a poem over four times as long, amplifying the idea of the world as dead through the girl's death. In this longer poem the dead world is dissected and analyzed. Determining this time to achieve an epic work, in 1611 he published (anonymously) the poem under the title : *An Anatomy of the World. Wherein, by Occasion of the Untimely Death of Mistress Etizabeth Drury, the Frailty and the Decay of this World is Represented.* It was prefaced by a commendatory poem by Joseph Hall, a contemporary satirist and wit and later Bishop of Norwich, entitled "To the Praise of the Dead, and the Anatomy." In the poem he included a statement of his resolve to celebrate the anniversary of Miss Drury's death annually. In 1612, faithful to his undertaking, he published (again, anonymously) the second poem, under the title : *The Progress of the Soul. Wherein, by Occasion of the Religious Death of Mistress Elizabeth Drury, the Incommodities of the Soul in this Life, and Her Exaltation in the Next, are Contemplated.* (Joseph Hall introduced it with a poem entitled "The Harbinger to the Progress").

These two poems are usually known as *The Anniversaries*, or the *First Anniversary* and the *Second Anniversary* respectively. The original titles should, however, be retained as they clearly indicate the contrasting purposes : the first centres on the death of the world and the girl's untimely death ; the second on the girl herself, whose death is no longer untimely but religious, and whose soul's progress is a subject for contemplation. The two poems are the most notable example of Donne's use of contrast. The second poem proved to be the last. Donne met adverse criticism, for it seemed to some that he had overpraised the girl exceedingly. We wonder what new aspect of the theme would have been treated if Donne had continued to write a poem every year as planned.

Ben Jonson declared that the two *Anniversaries* were profane and full of blasphemies, and that, if they had been written about Virgin Mary they would have been suitable. To this Donne replied that he had described the idea of a woman, and not as Elizabeth Drury was. Certainly the poems are not much concerned with the personality of the girl, and are not to be interpreted literally. They should be treated as religious poems, for which the death of Elizabeth Drury provided the occasion.

It may be pointed out that these two poems are based on the Ignatian* method of meditation. The first, negative in character, reproduces the negative aspects of Ignatius's method ; and the latter, more positive, represents the positive quest of "contemplation" (the word used by Ignatius and also in the title).

In *An Anatomy of the World*, Donne meditates upon the doom that has come upon the world, and considers the impact of new knowledge upon scholasticism and the coherent, co-ordinated world of the Middle Ages. As in the great *Nocturnal*, he apprehends existence without purpose, and studies the nature of the world from which unity, coherence, meaning have been withdrawn.

2. A summary of "An Anatomy of the World", with critical remarks : Lines 1--90. Elizabeth Drury's death, says the poet, is a deprivation for the world on which has descended, unknown to it, a lethargy, that is, forgetfulness : it is we who drink the waters of Lethe (the river of forgetfulness), not the dead Elizabeth. The world's name and meaning were concentrated in her, and so far the world, forgetting its name, has done nothing about her passing :

> But long she hath been away, long, long, yet none
> Offers to tell us who it is that's gone. (*Lines 41—2*)

The world is dead, and the only profitable undertaking is to anatomize the corpse (of the word), for the benefit of those who, influenced by her virtue, lead a twilight existence still. When a person dies, though the world's life continues, its doom is declared :

> Her death hath taught us dearly, that thou art
> Corrupt and mortal in thy purest part. (*Lines 61-2*)

Her influence creates a new world, which

> ....may be safer, being told
> The dangers and diseases of the old :
> For with due temper men do then forego,
> Or covet things, when they their true worth do know.
> (*Lines 87—90*)

Lines 91 - 190. The poet then considers the decline of man. The world is sick ; there is no health in us ; we do not live as long as the patriarchs ; we are not men who used to be ; the race of giants is at an end—not that size is anything in itself : a smaller edition of a book is still the book, but we have deteriorated mentally so much that

> We seem ambitious, God's whole work to undo ;
> Of nothing He made us, and we strive too,
> To bring ourselves to nothing back ; and we
> Do what we can, to do't so soon as He (*Lines 155 —158*)

***St. Ignatius (50—107 A.D.) was the Bishop of Antioch, and was martyred under the Emperor Trajan. He is the author of famous epistles.**

This section ends with the first occurrence of the refrain and the assertion that religion is our only hope. Without religion man withers and decays.

Lines 191—246. The decline of man has brought division to creation altogether. Society is disintegrating through the impact of new knowledge. Order exists no more. Instead of the concentric arrangement of the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire, man has to adjust himself to the new astronomy :

> And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,
> The Element of fire is quite put out ;
> The Sun is lost, and th' earth, and no man's wit
> Can well direct him where to look for it,
> And freely men confess that this world's spent,
> When in the Planets, and the Firmament
> They seek so many new ;...............
> ....
> For every man alone thinks he hath got
> To be a Phoenix, and that then can be
> None of that kind, of which he is, but he
>
> (*Lines 205—218*)

Now the individual is unique, making standards each for himself. Private judgment previls over authority, for there is no other phoenix for comparison. Her death means the withdrawal from life of the unifying influence :

> She that should all parts to reunion bow,
> She that had all magnetic force alone,
> To draw, and fasten sunder'd parts in one.
>
> (*Lines 220—222*)

She, she is dead, and this world is "rotten at the heart".

Lines 247—338. This section presents the world grown ugly. The old beauty of the heavens has passed away through new stars appearing and the old vanishing, removing the former round proportion and regular movements. When we consider the earth, especially its morality and administration of justice, "the world's proportion disfigured is" (line 302). Proportion, the essence of beauty, died with her.

Lines 339—376. Not only has the principal element of beauty, proportion, been removed, but colour and lustre also, without which proportion alone has no value :

> And had the world his just proportion,
> Were it a ring still, yet the stone is gone.
>
> (*Lines 341—342*)

Lines 377—end. The last section deals with the dissociation of heaven and earth, the last and greatest evidence of the decay of the world. If the heavens influenced earth more, she who has died would influence us more. But they cast no light on earth and the seasons are out of order. The old correspondence of heaven and *earth* is gone. The poem closes with a reference to the song of Moses in Deuteronomy *xxxii*, to which Donne referred more than once in his sermons

> ....if you
> In reverence to her, do think it due,
> That no one should her praises thus rehearse
> As matter fit for chronicle, not verse ;
> Vouchsafe to call to mind that God did make
> At last, and lasting'st piece, a song. He spoke
> To Moses to deliver unto all,
> That song, because He knew they would let fall
> The Law, the Prophets, and the History,
> But keep the song still in their memory.
> (*Lines 457—466*)

3. A summary of "The Progress of the Soul" or "*The Second Anniversary*", with critical remarks.

Lines 1—84. This poem begins with Donne saying that a year has passed since Elizabeth Drury's death. Truly, as he said before, the world died in her death, but a ship does not stop immediately the sails are struck. A decapitated man's body still twitches, and a sort of life has continued since her death, for there is motion in corruption. But we have lived oblivious of her, though the poet has done his best otherwise. He intends "yearly to bring forth such a child as this" (line 36). And who knows ? These annual poems may influence poets, long after this writer's death, to produce great grandchildren of these praises :

> And so, though not revive, embalm and spice
> The world, which else would putrefy with vice.
> (*Lines 39—40*)

Such remembrance may create in man a thirst for heavenly reality. This world is rotten, and no effort should be made to salvage anything from it even by memory. And so the first section ends with the refrain from the first poem, altered, and given for the last time :

> She, she is gone ; she is gone ; when thou knowest this,
> What fragmentary rubbish this world is
> Thou knowest, and that it is not worth a thought ;
> He honours it too much that thinks it naught.

Lines 85—156. The poet turns away from the negative meditation of death. His spirit released, he awakens to the positive creative work impossible without it, and the poem moves on, with ever-gathering strength, to celebrate the soul's ascent to heaven, and instead of the sombre reiteration of "She, she is dead ; she's dead", the word "up" is repeated many times, as though he cannot stay to say in full "Lift up your hearts".

The poet tells himself to think that he is dying and recognize that death is a release. Death's humble service is to lead the soul to the door that leads to life, and to open it. The friends around, weeping, who seem whole, are sick ; the dying man is about to be cured for ever :

> Think then, my soul, that death is but a Groom,
> Which brings a Taper to the outward room,
> Whence thou spiest first a little glimmering light,
> And after brings it nearer to thy sight :
> For such approaches doth heaven make in death.
> (*Lines 85—89*).

Lines 157 -250. The body causes the degradation of the soul, imprisoning it. But the body, like a rusty pistol, discharges the bullet, the soul. Death is the beginning of life. The soul is liberated from the restrictions of the body and flies at great speed through the air.

Lines 251—320. The contrast between earth and heaven is seen in the slowness of earth set against the soul's flight to heaven. This contrast is seen also in the contrast between human ignorance and immediate knowledge gained in heaven. "Poor soul, in this thy flesh what dost thou know ?" (line 254), and there is no end to our ignorance. After a long catalogue of examples he bursts out impatiently :

> …………But up unto the watch-tower get,
> And see all things despoil'd of fallacies……
> In heaven thou straight know'st all, concerning it,
> And what concerns it not, shalt straight forget.
> (*Lines 294—300*).

Lines 321—382. But this contrast is most vividly perceived by the consideration of human society and conversation, so corrupting and debasing on earth, so enriching and ennobling in heaven, where one will be with Mary, the Patriarchs, Apostles, and Virgins :

> Up, up, my drowsy soul, where thy new ear
> Shall in the Angels' songs no discord hear,………
> Up to those Patriarchs………
> Up to those Prophets………
> Up to th' Apostles…………
> Up to those Martyrs………
> Up to those Virgins……… (*Lines 339—357*).

Lines 383—470. The greatest earthly joys are insignificant as compared to the incidental joys of heaven. All earthly things change, and deceive, and die, like human beauty and love :

> ……*that* she, and *that* thou
> Which did begin to love, are neither now ;
> ……whilst you think you be
> Constant, you're hourly in inconstancy.
> (*Lines 391—400*).

This earth cannot be the basis of happiness any more than it can be the basis, or provide the materials for, a tower to climb to heaven. Felicity must be sought only in that which is enduring :

> This is essential joy, where neither he
> Can suffer diminution, nor we ;
> 'Tis such a full, and such a filling good ;
> Had th' Angels once look'd on him, they had stood.
> (*Lines 443—446*)

Lines 471—end. So, in the seventh and last section, it is asserted that even the least joys of heaven exceed the greatest joys of the earth :

> But could this low world joys essential touch,
> Heaven's accidental joys would pass them much.
> (*Lines 471-472*)

Few references to self. For the most part Donne's poetry is self-centred, and reference to himself is characteristic. Yet, writing three poems on Elizabath Drury, in all over a thousand lines, he refers only occasionally to himself, and this new discipline prepared him for the absorption of his whole nature in the source of his preaching, which emerges briefly in these lines :

> When nature was most busy, the first week,
> Swaddling the new born earth, God seem'd to like
> That she should sport her self sometimes, and play,
> To mingle, and vary colours everyday.
> (*An Anatomy of the World, Lines 347—350*)

and in these :

> As some days are at the Creation nam'd,
> Before the Sun, the which fram'd days, was fram'd......
> (*The Progress of the Soul, Lines 23-24*)

Worldly advantage resulting from these poems. In these poems his major concern is with the world, and a release from it. Yet they brought him considerable worldly advantage in the patronage of Sir Robert. These relatively long poems, with their hyperbolic praise of a young woman, contained an altogether exaggerated contempt of the world, which he had to express in order to outgrow. The poems are sincere expressions of a mood which changed, and were essential to the progress of his own soul.

12

The Divine Poems of Donne

I. La Corona
II. A Litany
III. Holy Sonnets
VI. Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward

I. "La Corona". The earliest of Donne's Divine Poems appears to be *La Corona*. *La Corona* is a single poem, composed of seven linked sonnets, each of which celebrates a Mystery* of faith. It is doubtful whether Donne felt there was anything particularly Catholic in concentrating on the Mysteries of the faith, or in addressing his second and third sonnets to the Blessed Virgin, or in addressing St. Joseph in his fourth ; but it is also doubtful whether anyone not brought up as a Catholic would have done so.**

The *La Corona* sonnets are inspired by liturgical† prayer and praise—oral prayer ; not by private meditation and the tradition of mental prayer. They echo the language of collects++ and office hymns, which expound the doctrines of the Catholic faith. Instead of the scene of the maiden alone in her room at Nazareth, there is a theological paradox : "Thy Maker's maker, and thy Father's mother". The scandal of the Cross is presented not by a vivid picture of its actual disgrace and agony, but by the thought that here the Lord of Fate suffered a fate at the hands of his creatures. The petitions with which the last three poems end are petitions which any man might pray. Each is the appropriate response to the Mystery propounded.

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*There are a number of Mysteries in the Christian religion. The Joyful Mysteries are : Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Presentation, Finding in the Temple. The Sorrowful Mysteries are : Agony, Scourging, Crowning with Thorns, Bearing of the Cross, Crucifixion. The Glorious Mysteries are : Resurrection, Ascension, Coming of the Holy Ghost, Assumption, Coronation. Donne's "rectified devotion" naturally omits the last two, because these have no basis in Scripture.

**It should be remembered that Donne was born and brought up as a Roman Catholic, and that it was later in his life that he became converted to the Anglican faith.

†"*liturgy*" means a form of *public* worship. It also refers to the Book of Common Prayer.

++"collects" are short prayers in the Common Prayer Book.

It is possible that Donne chose to use the sonnet (a form he had used before this only for epistles), because he wished to write formally and impersonally ; to create an offering of beauty and dignity. *La Corona* is perhaps no more than a religious exercise, but it is an accomplished one. The sonnets are packed with meaning, with striking and memorable expressions of the commonplaces of Christian belief. The last line of each, repeated as the first line of the next, is both a fine climax and a fine opening. Unlike the majority of Elizabethan sonneteers, Donne has chosen the more difficult form of the sonnet. He follows Sidney in limiting the rhymes of the octave to two, and employs Sidney's most favoured arrangement of these rhymes in two closed quatrains. He alternates between two arrangements of the rhymes of the sestet.

II. A Litany. *A Litany* is the next important Divine Poem. It is less successful than *La Corona*, but more interesting. It is a meditation in verse cast into the formal mould of a litany*. The stanza employed here is, however, of Donne's own invention. The poem appears impersonal, but is, in fact, highly personal. It tells us much, though indirectly, of its author's mind at the time when it was written. It is remarkable for a quality that is rare in Donne's poetry : sobriety. Although it is the wittiest of the Divine Poems, startling in paradox, precise in antithesis, and packed with allusions, its intellectual ingenuity and verbal audacity are employed to define an ideal of moderation in all things. It analyses temptations with scrupulosity, and shows a wary sense of the distinctions that divide the tainted from the innocent act or motive. Its style cannot be said to be "tormented". The ideal set forth is simplicity of motive, evenness of piety, and a keeping of the middle path.

A Litany was written during an illness and in a mood of dejection. There is in the poem an exaggerated stress on the compatibility of the service of God with "this world's sweet". This stress perhaps reflects Donne's need at this time to assure himself that some wordliness may not necessarily be wrong. If we remember the circumstances of his life at Mitcham—his anxiety for his wife whom he had brought to poverty and for the future of his growing family, his inability to find secure employment, and his broken health—the petitions of *A Litany* gain in meaning. We see the passionate and hyperbolical Donne, the proud and irritable young man of the Satires and the Elegies, trying to school himself to patience, not rejecting with scorn a world that has disappointed him, but praying that he may accept in a religious spirit what life brings.

In many ways *A Litany* is the most Anglican of the Divine Poems, and it continually anticipates Donne's leading ideas as a preacher. His own praise of this poem in a letter makes the typical Anglican claim of avoiding both excess and defect : "That by which it will deserve best acceptation is that neither the Roman Church

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***The word "litany" is used for a series of petitions for use in church services recited by a priest and responded to by people in repeated formulas.**

need call it defective, because it abhors not the particular mention of the blessed Triumphers* in heaven ; nor the Reformed can discreetly accuse it of attributing more than a rectified devotion ought to do." The particular sins which Donne prays to be delivered from are not the traditional sins. There is no trace of the old classification under which the conscience can be examined : sins against God and sins against my neighbour, or the Seven Deadly Sins and their branches. Instead, the sins in *A Litany* can all be referred back to two general philosophical conceptions : the conception of virtue as the mean between two extremes, and the related conception of virtue as the proper use of all the faculties. Donne anticipates here that ideal of "reasonable piety" which is so familiar later in the century in the writings of the Divines. The poem firmly rejects other-worldliness, and shows an anti-ascetic and anti-mystical bias. It concentrates on "a daily beauty" and the sanctification of ordinary life. It ignores any conception of sanctity as something extraordinary and heroic. It exalts the undramatic virtues of patience, discretion, and a sober cheerfulness.

A Litany has many felicities in thought and expression. It has a beauty of temper ; it tells us much about Donne's mind ; it is historically interesting as an early expression by a writer of genius of a piety characteristic of the Church of England. In spite of these merits, it cannot be regarded as a wholly successful poem. It is an elaborate private prayer, rather incongruously cast into a liturgical form Donne's letter to Goodyer shows his awareness of the discrepancy between such a "divine and public" name and his "own little thoughts". Indeed, the incompatibility between the material of the poem and the chosen form is too great. But the poem has some of Donne's most sumptuous verse. When merely describing the orders of the Church Triumphant, the angels, patriarchs and apostles, Donne yet manages to convey too his own satisfaction, as sensual as it is spiritual, with the eternal grandeur and power which may be claimed for that Church. Donne's own rapturous contemplation of the great good luck which men call death is not entirely without envy for one who, alone, could "desirously long to die" without committing sin. *Contemptus mundi* best fits him who, as *creator mundi*, knows and understands those feelings of humanity which prompt the cry

> For Oh, to some
> Not to be martyrs, is a martyrdom.

After Stanza XIII, the poem passes from a celebration of the Church Triumphant to an account of the Church Militant, man's needs on earth as expressed in prayer. Some of Donne's hardest, clearest, and finest thinking goes into this part of the poem.

III. Holy Sonnets. Donne wrote nineteen sacred sonnets besides the *La Corona* sequence, and it is to these that the general term "Holy Sonnets" usually refers. The problem of when the various sonnets in this group were written is a complex, largely theological, one. Many of them probably belong to that period of doubt and intense thinking about his religion which preceded Donne's entry into the Church. The years 1609—17 are the likeliest for the majority of these sonnets. Most critics have agreed in regarding the "Holy Sonnets" as superior to *La Corona* and *A Litany*. The "Holy Sonnets" give an immediate impression of spontaneity. The vehemence and anguished intensity of some of these sonnets have been connected with a deepening of Donne's religious experience.

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*Cranmer had banished the saints from the Litany, but Donne restores them in this poem, thus showing a certain loyalty to his old faith.

The "Holy Sonnets" have, for depth of passionate feeling, been compared with the sonnets of Michael Angelo, and also with the religious feeling in the work of Dostoievsky. The love of God which throbs through the sonnets so desperately was never the perfect love that casts out fear—fear that at the last he should find that there is a way to hell even from the gates of heaven. But the final hymns, which were also written during these years, strike a note of peace and confidence.

During his years (1605—1609) at Mitcham, Donne was a prey to what he afterward regarded as the sin of melancholy—at times, the sin of despair. At that time he was also in poor physical health. In Sonnets I, IV, and VI, Donne speaks as if he was not only sick in soul but sick in body :

> Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,
> I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
> And all my pleasures are like yesterday ; (I)
>
> Oh my black Soul ! now thou art summoned
> By sickness, death's herald, and champion ; (IV)
>
> And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoin
> My body and soul...... (VI)

In these rather sombre sonnets, the poet seeks strength, grace, and forgiveness from Christ, who is asked to rescue him from the toils of sin. The struggle to leave "the world, the flesh, the devil" is the theme of two more sonnets, *II* and *XIV* which suggest not physical sickness but a desire for resignation to God—though again arguing passionately that the author is himself powerless to escape from Satan without active aid. Number II states that the poet is God's rightful possession which Satan is trying to take away from God. God is asked to take back his creature by force. The line "And Satan hates me, yet is loth to lose me" suggests Donne's feeling, during the last years of his secular life, that all the world is against him and has rejected him, but that depite this rejection he cannot yet manage wholly to surrender to God of his own will. In this sonnet Christ appears as the sought-for lover and Donne as a temple usurped by the Devil. Sonnet XIV, the splendid "Batter my heart, three person'd God", uses the same idea and imagery more passionately. Again the image of usurpation occurs :

> I, like an usurpt town, to another due,
> Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end.

In both these sonnets, *II* and *XIV*, Christ is entreated to take full possession, as victor-lover, of the poet's soul.

Throughout the "Holy Sonnets" runs Donne's demand for God to become active in Donne's life. Thus he sees his need for God in terms of that life, and describes it in those terms :

> For I,
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me. (*XIV*)

Here the idea of God as the lover whose love alone is chastity is a profoundly central image. With the' contemporary language of profane love, Donne is able to realise the traditional idea of divine love as a concrete and important experience, in the communication of which he is unequalled by any other English poet.

So, again, the 1617 sonnet on his wife's death (No. *XVII*), Donne attributes to God "tender jealousy" of the world, the flesh, and the devil as God's rivals for possession of his soul. Sonnets IX and XII, on the difference between man and the rest of creation in respect of man's power to sin, are rather preoccupied with theological problems, but are not without their personal point of return—particularly Number IX with its tearful appeal :

> O God ? Oh ! of thine only worthy blood,
> And my tears, make a heavenly Lethean flood......

These lines are, however, surpassed by the beautiful Sonnet V which is full of the Renaissance wander-lust :

> You which beyond that heaven which was most high
> Have found new spheres, and of new lands can write,
> Pour new seas in mine eyes, so that I might
> Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
> Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more.

We have tears representing regret and regretted melancholy in Sonnet III :

> O might those sighs and tears return again
> Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,
> That I might in this holy discontent
> Mourn with some fruit, as I have mourned in vain ;
> In mine idolatry what showers of rain
> Mine eyes did waste ! What griefs my heart did rend !

Here, referring to his profane days, he says that he lavished tears of idle regret and melancholy—a false grief for unworthy objects.

Now this recollection grieves him and he sees that tears wasted on sinful things were themselves a sin. He thus regrets his past which was itself full of false regret. The phrase "in mine idolatry" occurs again in Sonnet XIII, which contains a reference to the poet's profane mistresses.

Donne's greatness as a religious poet lies in his truthfulness, in his having left in his "Holy Sonnets" a peronal record of a brilliant mind struggling towards God. He is no tafraid to analyse the appalling difficulties of faith :

I durst not view heaven yesterday : and today
In prayers, and flattering speeches I court God :
Tomorrow I quake with true fear of his rod.
So my devout fits come and go away
Like a fantastic ague :

Donne is able to put down, exactly and memorably, the waverings of the imperfect, temperamental man. And throughout the "Holy Sonnets", even for the "black soul", the love of God is felt as eternally available for rescue. But this love, like the love of profane mistresses, must be sought out, must be courted—not with "flattering speeches" but with all the humility and self-surrender which the seeker can summon.

One other sonnet that deserves mention is the very beautiful No. XVIII, "Show me, dear Christ, thy spouse, so bright and clear", which is a personal prayer to Christ to let him see the true Church, undivided because indivisible. This is one of the three holy sonnets which remained uncopied and unprinted until Edmund Gosse found them at the end of the nineteenth century. It shows clearly that in his heart the ideal, universal Church meant more to Donne than any particular form of Christianity. It is the third satire over again, but what was there set forth with cheerful, debating-society reasonableness as a series of cogent and interesting arguments is now felt as something which can only be prayed for. In the satire Donne was not emotionally involved in the problem ; it did not seem urgent :

Seek true religion. O where ? Mirreus
Thinking her unhous'd here, and fled from us,
Seeks her at Rome ; there, because he doth know
That she was there a thousand years ago.

But in the holy sonnets the strength of Donne's feeling is expressed in the rising stresses of a passionate plea for perfection and wholeness. England, Rome, and Geneva are no longer presented as morality figures, each with its own justification. These local habitations and names become fused in the one figure, whose femininity is characteristically insisted on in the paradoxical conclusion of the sonnet. At last, in the bride of Christ, Donne rejoices in one :

Who is most true, and pleasing to thee, then
When she is embraced and open to most men.

The bride of Christ is the mistress of the whole world.

One eminent critic finds a note of exaggeration in the "Holy Sonnets", and see this exaggeration not only in the violence of such a colloquy as "Batter my heart" (Sonnet XIV), but also in the strained note of such lines as these :

> But who am I, that dare dispute with theé ?
> O God ? Oh ! of thine only worthy blood, etc, etc.
> (Sonnet IX).

At first sight the closing couplet of this sonnet seems the expression of a deep humility ; but it cannot be compared for depth of religious feeling with the *Hymn to God the Father* where, however great the sin is, the mercy of God is implied to be the greater. This critic also points out the note of anguish in these sonnets. The image of a soul in meditation which these sonnets present is an image of the soul working out its salvation in fear and trembling. The two poles between which the soul oscillates are faith in the mercy of God in Christ, and a sense of personal unworthiness that is very near to despair. The flaws in their spiritual temper are a part of their peculiar power. No other religious poems make us feel so acutely the predicament of the natural man called to be the spiritual man. None present more vividly man's recognition of the gulf that divides him from God and the effort of faith to bridge that gulf.

Donne's art in writing the "Holy Sonnets" was to seem "to use no art at all". Hit language has the ring of a living voice, admonishing his own soul, expostulating with his Maker, defying death, or pouring itself out in supplication. He creates, as much as in some of the "Songs and Sonets", the illusion of a present experience, throwing his stress on such words as "now" and "here" and "this". And, as often there, he gives an extreme emphasis to the personal pronouns : "I", "me", "mine". The plain unadorned speech, with its idiomatic turns, its rapid questions, its exclamatory Oh's and Ah's wrests the movement of the sonnet to its own movement. Words, movements, and feeling have a unity in which no element outweighs the other.

His handling of the sonnet form. Donne exploits to the full the potentialities of the sonnet-form. As in *La Corona* he keeps to two rhymes in the octave, and varies his sestet, using either cddcee or cdcdee. The formal distinction of octave and sestet becomes a dramatic contrast. The openings of Donne's sestets are as dramatic as the openings of the sonnets themselves : impatient as in

> Why doth the devil then usurp in me ?

or, gentle as in

> Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack ;

or, imploring as in

> But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space.

Though the *turn* in each of these is different, in all three there is that sudden difference in tension which makes a change dramatic. Donne avoids also the main danger of the couplet-ending : that it may seem an after-thought, or an addition, or a mere summary. His final couplets, whether separate or running on from the preceding line, are true rhetorical climaxes, with the weight of the poem behind them. Except for Hopkins, no poet has packed more into the sonnet than Donne. In spite of all the liberties he takes with his line, he succeeds in the one essential of the sonnet : he appears to need exactly fourteen lines to say exactly what he has to say.

IV. Other Divine Poems. The rest of Donne's Divine Poems, with the exception of *The Lamentations of Jeremy,* are occasional. The poem *Upon the Annunciation and Passion* is very near in mood and style to *La Corona*. As there, Donne writes with strict objectivity. He contemplates two mysteries which are facets of one supreme mystery, and tries to express what any Christian might feel. On the other hand, *Good Friday, Riding Westward* is a highly personal poem : a free, discursive meditation arising out of a particular situation. The elaborate preliminary conceit of the contrary motions of the heavenly bodies extends itself into astronomical images, until the recollection of the Passion sweeps away all thoughts but penitence. The poem hinges on the sudden apostrophe :

> and thou look'st towards me,
> O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree.

After this, discursive meditation contracts itself to penitent prayer. The mounting tension of the poem—from leisurely speculation, through the imagination kindled by "that spectacle of too much weight", to passionate humility—makes it a dramatic monologue. So also does the feeling which it gives us of a second person present—the silent figure whose eyes the poet feels watching him as he rides away to the west.

Good Friday is the last divine poem Donne wrote before his ordination and it points forward to the Hymns. The Hymns also arise from particular situations, are free meditations, and have the same unforced feeling. They are the only lyrics among the Divine Poems, and it is not only in their use of pun and conceit that they remind us of the "Songs and Sonets". They have the spontaneity which *La Corona* and *A Litany* lack, without the over-emphasis of the "Holy Sonnets". In them Donne's imagination has room for play. Each sprang from a moment of crisis. The *Hymn to Christ*, for instance, was written on the eve of his journey overseas, a journey from which he felt he might not return. His imagination is fired by his immediate circumstances and he translates his thoughts into striking and moving symbols.

Absence of ecstasy from Donne's Divine Poems. There is an absence of ecstasy from Donne's Divine Poems, and this feature makes these poems very different from his love-poems. There is an ecstasy of joy and an ecstasy of grief in his love-poetry. But in his divine poetry we are conscious, almost always, of an effort of will. In the "Holy Sonnets" there is passion and longing, and in the Hymns some of the "modest assurance" which Walton attributed to Donne's last hours ; but there is no rapture. Donne's Divine Poems are the product of a conflict between his will and his temperament. They lack, therefore, the greatness of his love-poetry, whose power lies in its unchartered freedom, in the energy with which he explores and expresses the range of his temperament. In his love-poetry he is not concerned with what he ought or ought not to feel, but with the expression of feeling itself. Passion is there its own justification, and so is disgust, or hatred or grief. In his divine poetry feeling and thought are judged by the standard of what a Christian should feel or think. As a love-poet, he seems to owe nothing to what any other man in love had ever felt or said before him ; his language is all his own. As a divine poet, he cannot escape using the language of the Bible, and of hymns and prayers, or remembering the words of Christian writers. The truths of Donne's love-poetry are truths of the imagination, which freely transmutes personal experience. They are his own discoveries. But although the Divine Poems are not the record of Donne's discoveries, but of struggles to recognise and accept a truth which has been revealed, that truth does not "defeat all poetry", but gives us a poetry whose intensity is a moral intensity. Some religious poetry George Herbert's perhaps, can be regarded as a species of love-poetry, but Donne's is not of that kind. The image of Christ as Lover appears in only two of his poems (both written soon after the death of his wife). The image which dominates his divine poetry is the image of Christ as Saviour, the victor over sin and death.

13

The Love-Poetry of Donne

OR

Donne as a Love Poet

I

Donne's anti-Petrarchan, and also Petrarchan, treatment of love. The *Songs and Sonets* and the *Elegies* contain Donne's strange testament of love. When he started writing poetry, Petrarchan sonneteering was in full swing. Later in life when he paid court to noble ladies, he could Petrarchise in his own way with the best, though none of his love-poems is in the sonnet form. Young Jack Donne was in revolt against the whole Petrarchan convention. He rebelled not only against the sugared sonnets in which this convention found expression, but against the whole creed of chivalry and woman-worship. For the sugary language, he substituted a more realistic use of words "such as men do use", and a more dramatic and passionate lyrical verse. As for woman-worship, he looked upon woman as not a goddess but a creature, desirable indeed, though not adorable. However, no poet has at times used the language of adoration more daringly to express the feeling of the moment.

The sensual note in his love-poetry. There are, indeed, several strands in Donne's songs and elegies. Some of the love-poems are frankly, even arrogantly, sensual. In others the tears of passion are touched with shame and scorn. Others again are directly and splendidly passionate, like the following :

> "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love[1]."
> "If yet I have not all thy love[2]."
> "Twice or thrice had I loved thee[3]."
> "All kings and all their favourites.[4]"
> "Take heed of loving me.[5]"
> "Whoever comes to shroud me do not harm.[6]......"

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1. *The Canonization*.
2. *Love's Infiniteness*.
3. *Air and Angels*.
4. *The Anniversary*.
5. *The Prohibition*.
6. *The Funeral*.

The note of simple, pure affection. But there are still other poems in which Donne rises to a purer conception of love, neither Petrarchan nor Platonic, but something more concrete than either, compounded of passion and tenderness, mutual trust and entire affection. In *The Ecstasy*, he develops a philosophy of love which is in harmony with his later religious thought—the inter-dependence of soul and body. There is no doubt that the love of his wife, Ann More, which turned the wild gallant and lover of audacious paradoxes into the devoted husband who could attune his paradoxes to the utterance of simple affection :

> When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,
> But sigh'st my soul away.
> When thou weep'st, unkindly kind,
> My life-blood doth decay :
>
> It cannot be
>
> That thou lov'st me, as thou say'st,
> If in thine my life thou waste,
> That art the best of me.
>
> (*Song* : "Sweetest love, I do not go").

In all probability, it was her death, or the thought of her death, that inspired the profound desolation of the sublime *Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day*. We know at least that when she died all his love for her turned back to God from whom she came.

II

Distinctive imagery in Donne's love-poetry. If we turn from Elizabethan love-poetry to the "Songs and Sonets" and the Elegies of Donne, we find at once two distinguishing features. In the first place, Donne's poetry is in one respect less classical than that of the Elizabethans. There is far less in it of the superficial evidence of classical learning with which the poetry of the "University Wits" abounds, pastoral and mythological imagery. The texture of his poetry is more medieval than theirs in so far as it is more dialectical (though a dialectical evolution is not infrequent in the Elizabethan sonnet) Also the imagery in his poetry is less picturesque, more scientific, philosophic, realistic, and homely. The place of the "goodly exiled train of gods and goddesses", is taken by images drawn from all the sciences of the day, from the definitions and distinctions of the Schoolmen, from the travels and speculations of the new age, and from the experiences of everyday life. Maps and sea discoveries, latitude and longitude, the phoenix and the mandrake's root, the scholastic theories of angelic bodies and angelic knowledge, alchemy and astrology, legal contracts and *non obstantes**, "late school-boys and sour prentices", "the king's real and his stamped face"—these are the kind of images, erudite, fanciful, and homely which give to Donne's poems a texture so different at first glance from the florid and diffuse Elizabethan poetry.

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*The phrase occurs in *Love's Exchange*. It means a licence to do a thing in spite of a law to the contrary.

Difference between Ovid and Donne as regards their treatment of love. But if the imagery of Donne's poetry be less classical than that of Marlowe or the younger Shakespeare, there is no poet the spirit of whose love-poetry is so classical, so penetrated with the sensual, realistic, scornful tone of the Latin lyric and elegiac poets. If one reads rapidly through the three books of Ovid's *Amores*, and then in the same rapid fashion the Songs and the Elegies of Donne, one will note striking differences of style and treatment. Ovid develops his theme simply and concretely, Donne dialectically and abstractly. There is little of the ease and grace of Ovid's verses in the rough and vehement lines of Donne's Elegies. Ovid passes from one natural simple thought to another, from one aspect of dawn to another equally objective (in the famous thirteenth Elegy of the first book). Donne, in his song "Busy old fool, unruly Sun", just touches one or two of the same features, borrowing them doubtless from Ovid, but the greater part of this song is devoted to the subtle and extravagant but not the less passionate development of the thought that for him the woman he loves is the whole world.

The similarity between them. But if the difference between Donne's metaphysical conceits and Ovid's naturalness and simplicity is very great, the emotions, which they express, are, with some important exceptions, identical. The love which is the main burden of their verses is something very different from the ideal passion of Dante or of Petrarch, of Sidney, or Spenser. It is a more sensual passion. The same tone of witty depravity runs through the work of the two poets. There is in Donne a purer strain which is of the greatest importance, but at first sight Donne seems to be as sensual and depraved as Ovid.

Personal experience lies behind Donne's love-poetry. And yet even in these more cynical and sensual poems a difference between Donne and Ovid is perceptible to a careful reader. Donne seems to be imitating Ovid, and the depravity seems in part a reflected depravity. In revolt from the Elizabethan convention, Donne seems to be cultivating the Roman convention of Ovid, the convention of cynicism and sensuality. There is a gaiety in Donne's poems elaborating the thesis that love is a perpetual flux, fickleness the law of its being. Even those Elegies which seem to our taste most objectionable are aerated by a wit which makes us almost forget their indecency. In the last resort there is all the difference in the world between the untroubled, heartless sensuality of the Roman poet and the gay wit, the paradoxical and passionate audacities and sensualities of Donne impatient of an unreal convention, and eager to startle and delight his readers by the fertility and daring of his wit. We cannot suggest that Donne's love-poetry is purely an "evaporation" of wit, or that there is in it no reflection either of his own life as a young man or the moral atmosphere of Elizabethan London. It would be a much less interesting poetry if this were so. Donne has pleaded guilty to a careless and passionate youth :

In mine idolatry what showers of rain
Mine eyes did waste ? What griefs my heart did rend ?
That sufference was my sin ; now I repent ;
Cause I did suffer I must suffer pain.

From what we know of the lives of Essex, Raleigh, Southampton, Pembroke, and others, it is probable that Donne's Elegies come quite as close to the truth of life as Sidney's Petrarchanism or Spenser's Platonism The later cantos of *The Faerie Queene* reflect vividly the unchaste loves and troubled friendships of Elizabeth's Court The experiences of Donne's early amours do actually lie behind these poems

Sincerity, strength, cynicism, wit, dramatic intensity in Donne's love poems. But however we may explain the tone of these poems, it is impossible to deny their power, the vivid and packed force with which they portray a variously mooded passion working through a swift and subtle brain. If there is little of the elegant and accomplished art which Milton admired in the Latin elegiasts while he deplored their immorality, there is more strength and sincerity both of thought and imagination in Donne. There is brutal cynicism in "Fond woman, which wouldst have thy husband die". There is witty anger in *The Apparition*. There is mordant and paradoxical wit in *The Perfume* and *The Bracelet*. There is passionate dignity and strength in *His Picture* :

My body a sack of bones broken within,
And powders blew stains scatter'd on my skin.

There is passion that rises superior to sensuality and wit, and takes wing into a more spiritual and ideal atmosphere, in the poem *His Parting From Her* :

I will not look upon the quick'ning Sun,
But straight her beauty to my sense shall run ;
The air shall note her soft, the fire most pure ;
Waters suggest her clear, and the earth sure.

If we compare this poetry with Ovid's, the difference is apparent between an artistic, witty voluptuary and a poet whose passionate force redeems many errors of taste and art. If we compare this poetry with the sonnets and mythological idylls and heroical epistles of the Elizabethans, it is they, not Donne, who are revealed as witty and "fantastic" poets content to adorn a conventional sentiment with mythological fancies and verbal conceits. Donne's interest is his theme, love and woman, and he uses words not for their own sake but to communicate his consciousness of these surprising phenomena in all their varying and conflicting aspects. The only contemporary poems that have the same dramatic quality are Shakespeare's sonnets and some of Drayton's later sonnets. In Shakespeare, this dramatic intensity and variety is of course united with a rare poetic charm. Charm is a quality which Donne's poetry possesses in only a few single lines. But to the passion which animates these sensual, witty, troubled poems the closest parallel is to be found in Shakespeare's sonnets to a dark lady and in some of the verses written by Catullus.

The note of joy and of mutual contented passion. But neither sensual passion, nor gay and cynical wit, nor scorn and anger, is the dominant note in Donne's love-poetry. Of the last quality, there is, despite the sardonic emphasis of some of the poems, less than in either Shakespeare or Catullus. There is nothing in his poetry which speaks so poignantly of an outraged heart, a love lavished upon one who was worthless, as some of Shakespeare's sonnets and of Catullus's poems. The finest note in Donne's love-poetry is the note of joy, the joy of mutual and contented passion. His heart might be subtle to torment itself, but its capacity for joy is even more obvious. Other poets have done many things which Donne could not do. They have invested their feelings with a garb of richer and sweeter poetry. They have felt more deeply and finely the reverence which is in the heart of love. But it is only in the fragments of Sappho, the lyrics of Catullus, and the songs of Burns that we shall find the sheer joy of loving and being loved expressed in the same direct and simple language as in some of Donne's songs, only in Browning that we shall find the same simplicity of feeling combined with a similar swift and subtle dialectic :

(*a*) I wonder by my troth what thou and I
    Did, till we loved.

(*The Good Morrow*)

(*b*) For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love.

(*The Canonization*)

(*c*) If yet I have not all thy love,
    Dear, I shall never have it all.

(*Lovers' Infiniteness*)

Lines like these have the same direct, passionate quality as Burns's

O my love's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June.

The joy is as intense in Donne as it is in Burns, though it is of a more spiritual and intellectual quality in the former. And in the other notes of this simple passionate love-poetry, sorrow which is the shadow of joy, and tenderness, Donne does not fall far short of Burns in intensity of feeling and directness of expression. These notes are not so often heard in Donne, but "So, so break off this last lamenting kiss" (*The Expiration*) is of the same quality as Burns's "Had we never lov'd sae kindly". And strangest of all perhaps is the tenderness which came into Donne's poetry when a sincere passion quickened in his heart. The beautiful, if not flawless, Elegy XVI, "By our first strange and fatal Interview", and the "Valedictions" which he wrote on different occasions of parting from his wife, combine with the peculiar *elan* of all Donne's passionate poetry and its intellectual content a tenderness as perfect as anything in Burns or in Browning :

(*a*) O more than moon,
Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere,
Weep me not dead in thine arms, but forbear
To teach the sea, what it may do too soon.
(*A Valediction* : *Of Weeping*)

(*b*) Let not thy divining heart
Forethink me any ill,
Destiny may take thy part
And may thy fears fulfil ;
But think that we
Are but turn'd aside to sleep ;
They who one another keep
Alive, ne'er parted be.
(*Song* : "Sweetest love I do not go")

(*c*) Such wilt be thou to me, who must
Like th' other foot obliquely run ;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begun.
(*A Valediction* : *Forbidding Mourning*)

The poet who wrote such verses as these did not believe any longer that "love represents the principle of perpetual flux in nature".

The poems expressive of complex moods. But Donne's poetry is not so simple a thing of the heart and of the senses as that of Burns and Catullus. Even his purer poetry has more complex moods—for instance, *The Prohibition*—and it is metaphysical, not only in the sense of being erudite and witty, but in the proper sense of being reflective and philosophical. Donne is always conscious of the import of his moods ; and so it is that there emerges from his poems a philosophy or a suggested philosophy of love to take the place of the idealism which he rejects. If we compare a song of the joy of love by Burns or by Catullus with Donne's *The Anniversary*, the difference becomes at once apparent. Burns gets no further than the experience. Catullus gets no further than the obvious and hedonistic reflection that time is flying, and that the moment of pleasure is short. In Donne's poem, on the other hand, we feel a quickening of the brain, the vision extending its range, the passion gathering sweep with the expanding rhythms, and from the mind thus heated and inspired there emerges, not a cry that time might stay its course, but a clearer consciousness of the eternal significance of love, not the love that aspires after the unattainable, but the love that unites contented hearts. Indeed, the joy of love has never been expressed at once with such intensity and such elevation as in this poem.

The mood of sorrow. And it is with sorrow as with joy. There is the same difference of manner in the expression between Donne on one hand and Burns and Catullus on the other, and the deepest thought is the same. The *Nocturnal on St. Lucy's Day* is at the opposite pole of Donne's thought from *The Anniversary*, and compared with "Had we never lov'd sae kindly", or "Take, O take those lips away", both the feeling and its expression are metaphysical. But the passion is felt through the subtle and fantastic web of dialectic; and the thought from which the whole springs is the emptiness of life without love.

Donne's philosophy of love. The philosophy, then, which emerges from Donne's love-poetry studied in its whole compass is more than a purely negative one. Against the abstract idealism, the sharp dualism of the Middle Ages, he offers a justification of love as a natural passion in the human heart the meaning and end of which is marriage. The true escape from courtly or ascetic idealism of the Renaissance or the Middle Ages was a poetry which should do justice to love as a passion in which body and soul alike have their part, and of which there is no reason to repent. And this, with all its imperfections, Donne's love-poetry is.

Sensual love and spiritual love. In the love of his wife, Donne found the meaning and the infinite value of love. In later days he might bewail his "idolatry of profane mistresses", but he never *repented* of having loved. Between his most sensual and his most spiritual love-songs, there is no cleavage such as separates natural love from Dante's love of Beatrice, who is in the end Theology. The passion that burns in Donne's most outspoken elegies, and wantons in the Epithalamia, is not cast out in *The Anniversary* or *The Canonization*, but absorbed. It is purified and enriched by being brought into harmony with his whole nature, spiritual as well as physical. It has lost the exclusive consciousness of itself which is lust, and becomes merged in an entire affection.

The justification of natural love. This justification of natural love as fullness of joy and life is the deepest thought in Donne's love-poems. This thought is far deeper and sincerer than the Platonic conception of the affinity and identity of souls, with which he plays in some of the verses to Mrs. Herbert. The nearest approach that he makes to anything like a reasoned statement of the thought, latent rather than expressed in *The Anniversary*, is *The Ecstasy*. Here, with the same intensity of feeling, and in the same abstract, dialectical, erudite strain he emphasises the inter-dependence of soul and body:

> As our blood labours to beget
> Spirits, as like souls as it can...........
> ....
> Else a great Prince in prison lies.

It may be that Donne has not entirely succeeded in what he here attempts. In trying to state and vindicate the relation of soul and body he falls perhaps inevitably into the dualism which he is trying to transcend. He places them over against each other as separate entities, and the body bulks unduly. In love, says Pascal, the body disappears from sight in the intellectual and spiritual passion which it has kindled. That is what happens in *The Anniversary*, but not altogether in *The*

Ecstasy. Yet *The Ecstasy* makes us realise fully what Jonson meant by calling Donne "the first poet in the world for some things." And Coleridge said : "I should never find any fault with metaphysical poems if they were all like *The Ecstasy* or but half as excellent." It was only the force of Donne's personality that could achieve even an approximate harmony of elements so divergent as are united in his love verses.

Donne versus Milton. Milton felt, like Donne, the power and greatness of love, and like him could not accept a doctrine of love which seemed to exclude or depreciate marriage. The whole theme of Milton's thought is love, true love and its mysterious link with chastity of which, however, "marriage is no defilement." In the arrogance of his youthful purity Milton would doubtless have looked with scorn or disgust on Donne's elegies and songs. But perhaps pride is a greater enemy of love than such faults of sense as Donne in his passionate youth was guilty of. Whatever be the cause —pride, the disappointment of his marriage, political controversy— Milton never wrote any English love-poetry, except it be the one sonnet on the death of the wife who might have opened the sealed wells of his heart. Some want of the experience of love has dimmed the splendour of the great poem, *Paradise Lost*, in which he undertook to justify the ways of God to men. Donne is not a Milton, but he sounded some notes which touch the soul and quicken the intellect in a way Milton's magnificent verse fails to achieve.

III

Donne's anti-Petrarchan treatment of love. It was John Donne who broke the supremacy of the Petrarchan tradition. From the line of Wyatt*, Surrey**, and their contemporaries of the court of Henry VIII, English lyrical and amatory poetry had been flowing continuously in the Petrarchan channel. The tradition which these poets had imported from the Schools of Dante, Ariosto and Petrarch (all Italians), after languishing for some years, was revived and invigorated by the influence of Ronsard and Desportes (French poets). Spenser in *The Shepherd's Calendar* and Sidney with the gallant and passionate sonnets to Stella led the way. Thereafter, till the publication of Davison's† *Poetical Rhapsody* in 1602, and subsequently in the work of such continuers of an older tradition as Drummond‡, the poets adopted the same vein in sonnet sequence, or pastoral eclogue and lyric. Of the joy of love, the deep contentment of mutual passion, they have little to say (except in some of the finest of Shakespeare's sonnets to his unknown friend), but much of its pains and sorrows—the sorrow of absence, the pain of rejection, the inquial and many of his love poems are, simply, talk ; they are essentially contemporary, in the present tense ; and the reader finds himself at once *in media res**.

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*Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503—1542).

**Earl of Surrey (1517—1547).

†Francis Davison (1575—1619), Secretary of State to Queen Elizabeth. He issued, with his brother Walter, a *Poetical Rhapsody* in 1602.

‡William Drummond (1585—1649) wrote songs, sonnets, elegies, satires, etc.

The first of the *Songs and Sonets* begins with natural, probable human speech :

> I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
> Did, till we lov'd ? Were we not wean'd till then ?
> But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly ?

These lines describe an experience of awakening, and astonishment at it, which is both real and familiar ; but stating it by making part of what it describes, like a love-letter. One is made aware at once of dealing with real people in true, dramatic situations. No reader can fail to re-live the opening words of *The Computation* :

> For the first twenty years, since yesterday,
> I scarce believed, thou could'st be gone away.........

Quickly the poem moves on to consider implications and objections, and we find ourselves in an argument. The speech is not only colloquial, but also argumentative and sometimes contentious, and realism is achieved by the poem itself presenting the familiar human situation of an argument exposed in its falsity, or carried too far and made to retreat. The poem itself comes alive and, through the developing, changing argument—he is essentially a poet who thinks aloud—the position at the end may be different from that at the beginning. (Indeed, this is commonly so, as in the song "*Go and catch a falling star*", *The Sun Rising*, *the Triple fool*, *A Valediction : Of My Name, in the Window*, *Twickenham Garden*, *The Message*, *The Ecstasy*, *The Primrose*, *A Jeat Ring Sent*, *The Prohibition*. *The Undertaking* stands apart with *A Nocturnal*, as a poem of reiteration. With the repeated use of words like "yet", "but", these poems have astonishing agility. This is assisted by the great variety of stanza forms in the *Songs and Sonets*, well over forty in number and rarely repeated ; and this diversity is in close relation with the changing mood and attitude of the poet toward the theme of love, over many years, the varied experiences requiring varied stanzaic forms to embody them. Sometimes, as in *Love's Usury*, *Love's Alchemy*, *The Damp*, the theme is : "......let my body reign" (as stated in the first of these poems). Or he presents woman as fickle, changeable, and himself as expounding the variety which is opposed to the errors of the "poor heretics in love", who "think to establish dangerous constancy". Sometimes he is bitter, almost savage ; but much more often he is positive and affirmative. These poems study the subject from every possible angle, but they are not about love ; they are communications from one experiencing an aspect of it.

Obscurity. The argument alters its course, the stanza forms vary from poem to poem, because he changes too ; now he is impudent, reckless, irresponsible ; now his mind, instead of his emotions, dominates the subject, and in a moment of scintillation he throws out ideas and suggestions which ask to be explored. As a result the poems are rich in pregnant thought, and once our minds are stirred we share his sense of vitality ; for him a thought was a deep, enriching experience ; he was at home with paradox and seeming contradiction because such true thoughts are our nearest approach to God, who is a mystery. Donne's obscurity and difficulty are not meant to irritate ; they are a valid communication of the essential nature of truth.

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* *in media res*—in the middle of a situation.

Allusions in his love-poetry. The poems are natural in being colloquial and argumentative and diverse. The same realism is achieved through the innumerable allusions to the familiar, contemporary scene—everyday home life, a window, a dream, maps and voyages, the human body and its health, law, astronomy, war, time, love, death, business. There are, it is true, allusions in his verse which appear recondite to us, but which had a familiar meaning in his day. Leslie Stephen's words may well be remembered when reading these poems : "What strike us as unaccountable conceits are simply applications of the current philosophy." In his sermons, as in his poems, he refers to the "schools", and has in mind the vast range of medieval philosophical, and theological teaching which comprehended human knowledge synthetically, expressed supremely in the *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas. Words which are still part of the English vocabulary—wit, conceit, essence, quintessence, elixir, correspondence, balm, humour, concoction, element, intelligence, simple, sphere, neutrality, spirit (*e.g.*, animal spirits)—carried suggestions of ideas long since forgotten by most people, and we have to understand their meaning in his day to appreciate his use of them. The rival claims for Ptolemy and Copernicus, for Paracelsus, provide a background for the poems, and modern scholarship has heen devoted to an exposition of these many allusions. In view of the separation of the "secular" from the "divine" poems, it is the more necessary to indicate that the former carry many references to religious matters and, just as it is necessary to perceive allusions to medicine, law and astronomy, so it is essential to acknowledge the religious interest of many of the "Songs and Sonets", with their references to body and soul, faith and works, death and burial, the oath, the anathema, heresy, canonization, profanity, the elergy, religious orders, sacrilege, relics, martyrs, epitaphs. *A Valediction* : *Of the Book* is an extended reference to religious matters—a book compiled from love-letters becomes a missal or breviary for love's divines.

V

Exhaustive treatment of the psychology of love. Jonson held that a poet should be able to write exhaustively about almost everything. Donne came near to fulfilling such an ideal on the subject of the psychology of love. In his "Love Elegies" and "Songs and Sonets", the individual speaker sometimes loves all women and sometimes he curses or despairs of all, or announces that he is through with love. Sometimes he says that he can love any woman, or any woman so long as she is true, or any woman so long as she is untrue. Sometimes he cares only for the woman's body and the physical act of love. On at least one occasion he claims to love one woman's virtuous soul. In some of the best poems, he insists that love is properly fulfilled only when it embraces both body and soul. But before we conclude that these poems are direct reflections of one unusually varied sexual autobiography, we should notice that two* of the poems are written in the voice of a woman, one of them arguing wittily for absolute female promiscuity ("Good is not good, unless a thousand it possess"—*Confined Love*). In addition to their varied attitudes and speakers the poems explore various forms of address: a lover advises other lovers on how best to begin an affair; he satirizes the foulness of another lover's mistress; he celebrates a full year of love; he imagines the future canonization of himself and his mistress as saints of a new religion of love; he laments the death of his loved one; he imagines his own burial; he makes his will. And he frequently explores the technical metaphysical subtleties concerning the nature and number of the new being who results from the perfect union of lovers.

We value the note of simple tenderness in the song "Sweetest love, I do not go" partly because it is so rare in Donne. And *The Flea* is memorable, among other reasons, because it is one of the few occasions on which Donne used (and parodied) the traditional persuasion to love.

It is almost as if Donne wished to explore all the possibilities of personal love poetry except the sort that had been most popular in English: the poem which declares initial passion or devotion and attempts to persuade the lady to respond. In nearly all of his best love poems the speaker is either passionately engaged or outrageously witty and playful or both.

VI

He is a disparaging commentary by a well-known critic on Donne's love-poetry:

Three levels of sentiment. Three levels of sentiment may be traced in Donne's love-poetry. On the lowest level (lowest, that is, in order of complexity), we have the celebration of simple appetite, as in *Elegy XIX*, which may be described as a pornographic poem, which means that it arouses the appetite it describes. On the highest level, we have the poems of virtuous love—*The Undertaking*, *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, and *The Ecstasy*. It is here that the contrast between Donne and his happier contemporaries is most marked. He is trying to follow them into the new age, to be at once passionate and innocent. Something seems to be wrong in these poems. If the romantic conception of "pure" passion has any meaning, it is not like this. It does not prove itself pure by talking about purity. It does not keep on, as Donne does, drawing distinctions between spirit and flesh to the detriment of the latter and then explaining why the flesh is, after all, to be used. The result in these poems of Donne is therefore singularly unpleasant. It is quite arguable that *The Ecstasy* is a much nastier poem than *Elegy XIX*. What any sensible woman would make of such a wooing it is difficult to imagine.

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* *Confined Love* and *Break of Day*.

Donne and the medieval tradition of love-poetry. Between these two extremes falls the major portion of Donne's love-poetry. In certain superficial respects it continues the medieval tradition. Love is still regarded as a god, and lovers the clergy of that god; oaths may be made in "reverential fear" of that god's "wrath"; and the man who resists the god of love is a "rebel and athiest". Donne can even doubt whether those who admit Love after a struggle have not lost the god's grace by their resistance, like "Small towns which stand stiff, till great shot/Enforce them."* Donne can personify the attributes of his mistress, the "enormous giant", her Disdain, and the "enchantress Honour"†, like any medieval poet. A reader may wonder, then, why the total effect of Donne's poetry is so different from that of the Middle Ages; but Donne himself has explained this when, speaking of the god of love, he says:

> If he wrung from me a tear, I brin'd it so
> With scorn or shame, that him it nourish'd not.
>
> (*Love's Diet*)

This admirable couplet not only tells us briefly what Donne has effected but shows that he knew what he was doing. It does not, of course, cover every single poem. A few poems admittedly express delighted love and they are among Donne's most popular pieces; such are *The Good Morrow* and *The Anniversary*.

Five major themes in his love-poetry. But the majority of the poems deal with variations on five themes, all of them grim—sorrow of parting (including death), the miseries of secrecy, the falseness of the mistress, the fickleness of Donne, and finally a contempt for love itself. The poems of parting stand next to the poems of happy love in general popularity, and are often extremely moving. The song "Sweetest love, I do not go" is remarkable for its broken, but haunting, melody, and nowhere else has Donne fused argument, conceit, and classical imitation into a more perfect unity. *The Fever* is equally remarkable. It has a merit very rare in Donne—inevitability. It is a single jet of music and feeling, a straight flight without the appearance of effort. The remaining four of the five themes are all various expressions of the "scorn or shame" with which Donne "brines" his reluctant tribute to the god of love; monuments to the close kinship between certain kinds of love and certain kinds of hate. The faithlessness of women is sometimes treated playfully; but there is

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*From the poem *Love's Exchange*.

‡In the poem *The Damp*.

always something which stops these poems short of a true anacreontic[*] gaiety—for instance, the clever surprise in *Woman's Constancy* or the grotesque in "Go and catch a falling star". The theme of faithlessness rouses Donne to more characteristic poetry in such a hymn of hate as *The Apparition*, or in the sad mingling of fear, contempt, and self-contempt in *A Lecture Upon the Shadow*. The pains of secrecy find expression in equally fierce and turbulent writing. *Elegy XVI* is, along with many other nauseas and indignations, a sickened male contempt for the whole female world of nurses, and midnight "startings" and hysterics. But *The Curse* is unambiguous. The ending here is particularly delicious just because the main theme, an attack on jealousy, is medieval and associated with the "honour of love". As for the poet's own fickleness, we might expect a merry treatment, and perhaps in *The Indifferent* we get it. But even this poem seems to have a sting in it. In *Love's Usury*, the struggle between lust and reason, and the struggle between love and reason, are already known to us; but Donne is perhaps the first poet who has ever painted lust holding love at arm's length, in the hope, that "there's no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet"—and all this only as an introduction to the crowning paradox that in old age even a reciprocated love must be endured. The poem is, in its way, a masterpiece, and a powerful indirect expression of Donne's habitual "shame and scorn". For, in the long run, it must be admitted that "the love of hatred and the hate of love" is the main, though not the only, theme of the "Songs and Sonets". A man is a fool for loving and a double fool for saying so in "whining poetry". A woman's love at best will be only the "sphere" of a man's—inferior to it as the heavenly spheres are to their intelligences or air to angels. Love is a spider that can change all sweets into bitter; love is a devil who differs from his fellow-devils at court by taking the soul and giving nothing in exchange. The mystery which the Petrarchans or their medieval predecessors made of love is "all imposture", like the claims of alchemists. Love is a very simple matter, and all it comes to in the end is: "that my man/Can be as happy as I can" (*Love's Alchemy*). Unsuccessful love is a plague and a tyranny; but there is a plague even worse: Love might try "a deeper plague to make her love me too!" (*Love's Deity*). Love enjoyed is like gingerbread with the gilt off[†]. What pleased the whole mind now pleases one sense only

> And that so lamely, as it leaves behind
> A kind of sorrowing dullness to the mind.

The limited and transitory appeal of his love-poetry. "Songs and Sonets", then, is a collection of verse describing with unusual and disturbing energy the torments of a mind which has been baffled in its relation to sexual love by certain temporary and highly special conditions. To admit the unusual and disturbing energy is, of course, to admit that Donne is a poet ; he has been able to "put his stuff across" (that is, to communicate his "stuff" to us). But the appeal of this "stuff" is transitory and limited and, as it were, accidental. We can imagine a poet dealing with the same stuff in a way that would permanently engage our attention. But Donne's limitation is that the interest of his stuff, except for a mind specially predisposed in its favour, must be short-lived and superficial, though intense. Paradoxical as it may seem, Donne's poetry is toc simple to satisfy us. Its complexity is all on the surface—an intellectual and fully conscious complexity that we soon come to the end of. Beneath this we find nothing but a limited series of "passions"—explicit, mutually exclusive passions which can be instantly and adequately labelled as such. There are puzzles in Donne's work, but we can solve them all if we are clever enough. There is none of the depth and ambiguity of real experience in him. The same is true, for the most part, of the specifically "metaphysical" comparisons. One idea has been put into each and nothing more can come out of it. When we have once mastered a poem by Donne, there is nothing more to do with it.

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[*] *anacreontic*—convivial and amatory.

[*] *gingerbread with the gilt of*—something that has been stripped of its external or casual attractions.

The parasitic nature of Donne's love-poetry. Nor will it do to say that Donne's love-poems should interest us permanently because of their "truth". Of course, Donne is true in the sense that passions such as he describes do occur in human experience. So do many other things. He makes his own selection, like Dickens, or Gower, or Herrick, and his world is neither more nor less "real" than theirs, while it is obviously less real than the world of Homer, or Virgil, or Tolstoy. In one way, indeed, Donne's love-poetry is less true than that of the Petrarchans, in so far as it largely omits the very thing that all the fuss is about. Donne shows us a variety of sorrows, scorns, angers, disgusts, and the like which arise out of love. But if anyone asked : "What is all this *about* ? What is the attraction which makes these partings so sorrowful ? What is the peculiarity about this physical pleasure which he speaks of so contemptuously, and how has it got tangled up with such a storm of emotions ?" To these questions the poetry of Donne supplies no answer. For the answers to these questions we have to read some ordinary love-poetry. This leads us to the conclusion that Donne's love-poetry is parasitic, which means that Donne's love-poems could not exist unless love-poems of a more genial character existed first. He shows us amazing shadows cast by love upon the intellect, the passions, and the appetite ; but to learn of the substance which cast them we must go to other poets, more balanced, more magnanimous, and more humane. There are certainly some two or three poems in which Donne himself presents the substance, and these poems have certainly a great appeal. But, in the main, his love-poetry is *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark.

VII

The fascination of sex. Not sensual nor sensuous but passionate is the note of the young Donne and his verse, an intense susceptibility to the fascination of sex, a fascination that at once allures and repels, enthrals and awakens a spirit of scornful rebellion. He ranges through the whole gamut of passion from its earthliest to its most abstractly detached moods. There are different strata in his love poems. At the one extreme are poems of seduction and illicit love with its accompaniment of passion and scorn. Such are most of the Elegies ; and in the "Songs and Sonets" a concentrated outburst as *The Apparition*, or so finely woven a web of thought as *The Ecstasy*, though the latter becomes a vindication of the interconnection and inter-dependence of soul and body, which was to be a cardinal principle of Donne's religious thought at a later period. One may, if one chooses, suspect in these poems the revelation of a love-affair with a married woman, an intrigue with an unmarried girl in *Elegy IV* ("The Perfume"), or one may read them as witty and paradoxical elaborations of general theses suggested by Donne's naturalistic revolt against the insincerities of Petrarchan sonneteers—the fickleness of women, his own delight in change, the folly of confining by rules and relationships, sophisticated justifications of seduction, scorn of women's affected constancy, and of the physical basis of love which no refinements and hyperboles of love-poets can disguise. Some breathe, even if the main theme be the same, a purer and more simply passionate note : *Elegy XII* which seems to tell of a wife passionately loved in secret though over them hung the

> husband's threatening eyes
> That flam'd with the oily sweat of jealousy,

and a large body of the songs as "I wonder by my troth", "For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love", "Oh, do not die", "Twice or thrice had I loved thee", "All kings and all their favourites", "I'll tell thee now, dear love, what thou shalt do", "Whoever comes to shroud me do not harm", "Take heed of loving me", "So, so break off this last lamenting kiss". Some of these may belong to a later period when Donne was the lover and wooer of Ann More. To a later period certainly belongs a small group of songs and perhaps *Elegy XVI*. The songs are "Sweetest love, I do not go", "As Virtuous men pass mildly away," and *A Valediction : Of Weeping*. These were written after his marriage when business of one kind or another called Donne away from home.

The traditional note. One group of songs shows Donne in an unusual role. In these songs his attitude is that of the traditional Petrarchan wooer of a fair but obstinate lady, one whom he reproaches not for fickleness or sensuality or a half-hearted reluctance to yield to love, but for coldness and reserve :

> O perverse sex where none is true but she,
> Who's therefore true because her truth kills me.

These poems are *Twickenham Garden*, the sombre and powerful *Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day*, *The Blossom*, *The Primrose*, *The Relic*, and *The Damp*. None of the Elegies is in this key. In the Elegies the tone is set, not by Petrarch, but by Ovid.

Compliments to noble ladies. The change of tone in the above group of poems represents a difference in the social status of the persons addressed. Here Donne is, like other poets, adopting the Petrarchan convention to pay compliments to the noble ladies of his acquaintance. The titles of three of these poems—*Twickenham Garden*, *A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day*, and *The Primrose* suggest a connection with the countess of Bedford and Mrs. Magdalen Herbert. The first two were exquisite and passionate compliments to his great lady-patron, Lucy (Countess of Bedford) who occupied Twickenham Park from 1608 to 1617. *The Relic* could be an impassioned compliment to Mrs. Herbert :

> These miracles we did ; but now alas,
> All measure and all language I should pass,
> Should I tell what a miracle she was.

It is more difficult to imagine her as the person addressed in *The Pimrose* and *The Damp*. These could have been intended as compliments to ladies like the Countess of Huntingdon.

VIII

Donne's love-poems take for their basic theme the problem of the place of human love in a physical world dominated by change and death. The problem is viewed in many different ways, sometimes implicity, sometimes explicity, sometimes by asserting the immortality of love, sometimes by declaring the futility of love. Thus the "Songs and Sonets" hold within themselves every conceivable attitude toward love threatened by change. At the one extreme lie the cynical, cavalier songs, the famous "Go and catch a falling Star," or *The Indifferent*, spoken by one who can "love any, so she be not true." Even beyond this, we have the extreme of bitter disillusionment in that sombre poem *Farewell to Love*, where the poet asks whether love is no more than a ginger-bread king discarded after a fair. At the other extreme, we shall find such a poem as *The Undertaking* where Donne moves towards Platonic love, challenging the reader with these words : "If, as I have, you also do/Virtue attir'd in woman see......which is to keep that hid."

14

The Dramatic Quality of Donne's Poetry

Two different meanings of the word "dramatic". The dramatic quality of Donne's poetry has generally been acknowledged.* There is, however, no unanimity regarding the meaning of the word "dramatic", and this word may well be applied to Donne's poetry in more senses than one. If by "dramatic" we mean what stirs the emotions through the sight, especially of attitudes and gestures, *The Apparition* will answer that definition best of all the "Songs and Sonets". In this poem we have a sordid but striking *mise-en-scene* :** the lovers in bed, the man pretending to sleep, the woman pinching him in vain, the "sick taper" that begins "to wink" at the entrance of the ghost. Directly opposed to this pictorial conception of the dramatic is the purely psychological one. *The Relic* is an illustration of the dramatic quality in this other sense. It is also an example of the fitness of style in Donne's poetry. As regards this poem, it is impossible to conceive those tremendous adventures of soul, mind, and sense expressed by dainty, tripping lines, by smooth, ambling lines or even by the majestic sounding-board line of Milton, which expresses the reposeful sweep of the mind rather than its dramatic stress and conflict.

Two characters in most poems. But there is yet another sense in which the word "dramatic" is used, and it is in that sense that the word is most suitable as applied to a large number of poems which compose the "Songs and Sonets". In many of these poems there are two characters : one who speaks and the second who remains silent. The words of the silent character are not written down, but we are enabled to guess how he acts and what he would say if he were allowed to speak. The way in which Donne gives us these hints is both very clear and very modern. More important still for us here is the effect produced on the speaking character by the presence of a listening one whom he tries to persuade and win over.

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*Edward Dowden, however, almost denies this quality in Donne's poetry. He says : "Touches of dramatic power are rare in Donne, whose genius was lyrical and meditative, not that of a dramatist."

***mise-en-scene*—scenery and properties of an acted play (Figuratively this expression means surroundings of an event).

Few examples of dialogue in these poems. Of downright dialogue there is hardly any example in Donne, unless it be the "eclogue" which serves as a prelude to the Somerset epithalamium : there it is chiefly a device for heaping additional flattery upon the bride and the bridegroom, and a courtly apology for the poet's absence at the wedding. In his Satires, Donne sometimes gives the words of his victims in the direct style, not without liveliness. But in the "Songs and Sonets" there is no such thing.

Valedictions and their dramatic character. The four poems which share the title "Valediction" are dramas of the simplest kind. In one of them at least, and possibly in the others too, the mistress from whom the poet-lover parts is weeping. But the interest centres on the symbol that provides three of the poems with their sub-titles : "Of my Name, in the Window", "Of the Book", "Of Weeping" ; and though Donne called the fourth : "A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning", it is the poem which we are sure to remember as the one in which the parted lovers are compared to "stiff twin compasses". The song "Sweetest love, I do not go" is to all intents and purposes a valediction, though Donne did not give it that title, perhaps because there was no symbol in it to emphasise its difference in sameness ; but it is all the more touching for the directness of its appeal, since it is not withdrawn from the characters and the scene to a mere term of comparison.

The poem, "Break of Day", and its dramatic quality. *Break of Day* is also a valediction, more precisely a descendant of the medieval *aube**. Here, for once, in the "Songs and Sonets", the woman speaks, and so well that this poem alone would suffice to prove Donne's capacity to express the feelings of others, and permit us to presume that even when the speaker is a man he may not necessarily be the poet himself. *Break of Day* stands not unworthy of comparison with the parting scene in *Romeo and Juliet*.

The language of this poem is as naked as can be, but its very nakedness speaks passion :

> 'Tis true, 'tis day ; what though it be ?
> O wilt thou therefore rise from me ?
> Why should we rise, because 'tis light ?
> Did we lie down, because 'twas night ?
> Love which in spite of darkness brought us hither,
> Should in despite of light keep us together.

The manner of speaking of the woman is impassioned, and the short panting questions are eagerly gasped out. The man's excuse, though unexpressed, is anticipated by the woman. Similarly, in the last stanza he pleads, or is supposed to be ready to plead, the call of his professional duties : "Must business thee from hence remove ?"

****aube***—composition on the subject of dawn. Literally the word means "dawn" or "day-break".

she asks. The woman's anger against her lover's business sounds natural and sincere in its exaggeration :

> Oh, that's the worst disease of love,
> The poor, the foul, the false, love can
> Admit, but not the busied man.

Yet the final couplet has a touch of epigrammatic wit :

> He which hath business, and makes love, doth do
> Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.

The poem ends less dramatically than it began, but that sometimes happens also in the speeches of Shakespearean characters, at least in the earlier plays.

The dramatic quality of "The Sun Rising". In *The Sun-Rising*, we find the same situation and a similar feeling. But here the lover addresses the sun, and his scolding sounds more rhetorical than dramatic. Yet the scenery, sketched in a few skilful strokes, saves the poem from the fault of ranting in cold blood. The rays of the sun peer through the windows and the drawn curtains into the bed, a property only alluded to in *Break of Day* but here brazenly mentioned in the concluding lines of the last two stanzas, so as to leave us in no doubt of its paramount importance :

> Ask for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
> And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.
>
> Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere ;
> This bed thy centre is, these walls thy sphere.

The dramatic quality of "The Good Morrow". *The Good Morrow* seems related to the foregoing group of poems, but the connection is merely metaphorical. The lovers are not parting, nor does the sun remind them that it is time to part. Their souls, not their bodies, have just awakened. Their happiness is for the moment unalloyed ; they wonder how they lived before they loved. Therefore the dramatic element appears less vividly than in the poems in which there is fear, or at least a sense that the lovers' joy is short-lived. But the poem succeeds in creating a voluptuous atmosphere and depicting two flesh-and-blood human beings who act in relation to each other. The impression of passionate reality results partly from the poet's artfully concealed art, an art that is truly dramatic.

No progression in some of these poems. In all the poems mentioned above, the situation and even the feelings are at the end what they were at the beginning. In other words, these poems lack "progression". But there are other poems in which Donne's technique shows itself to be more complex : the initial situation develops more or less, there are episodes and vicissitudes, or at least some sort of evolution.

An analysis of the Song "Sweetest Love I do not go". The song "Sweetest Love, I do not go" gives more importance to the woman's part. The poet alters his tone according to the effect produced upon her by what he has just said. In the first stanza, he tries to make her smile ; but he seems to fail, since the second stanza more seriously attempts to comfort her by promising a speedy return. Yet this also proves unavailing and he, feeling helpless at the sight of her increasing grief, expresses in the third stanza his own despondency. Man, he says, cannot add another hour to his good fortune, nor can man recall a lost hour. But man knows how to assist misery when it comes and "teach it art and length" to advance over him. Such sombre wisdom rather justifies the woman's grief as being natural. So in the fourth stanza he entreats her to spare him and not to grieve, because her grief is his death :

> When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,
> But sigh'st my soul away...

Besides, he says in the fifth stanza, anticipating evil means bringing it about and so now the woman listens, in a quieter mood, to his appeal to make light of his absence, and to his assurance that no separation ever takes place between those "who one another keep alive". The appeal to her pity, with a touch of superstition in it, has succeeded where wit, sense and philosophy have been of no avail. Thus interpreted dramatically, this beautiful poem achieves a unity that would not be apparent if it is regarded as a lyric of the ordinary kind. We must, of course, fill the logical gaps with lovers' kisses and embraces, sighs and sobs, weeping and the wiping of tears, etc. We must also realise the failure of the lover's first efforts in order to understand the mounting pathos, and the relative success that follows so that we may appreciate the subdued and pacified tone of the conclusion.

An analysis of "The Canonization". *The Canonization* stands alone among the "Songs and Sonets" because the person addressed in it is a male friend. But the theme here too is love. The speaker in the poem rejects the worldly-wise advice offered to him and justifies his abandonment to passion. The famous opening line, "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love", shows us Donne at his best in the brusque familiar style. In the rest of the first stanza he makes fun of himself*, and then of his friend, but shows all the strength of his passion in the appeal : Do anything, "so you will let me love". The satirical note re-apears in the second stanza, where it sounds still more clearly. The first line states the simple thought in simple terms : "Alas, alas, who's injured by my love ?" The next lines are a rhetorical amplification of that thought. The poet here parodies the hyperbolical metaphors of the Petrachans :

> What merchants' ships have my sighs drown'd ?
> Who says my tears have overflow'd his ground ? etc. etc.

In the last three lines of this stanza, the satire becomes more stinging ; it still hits the love-poets who have exaggerated the influence of their love upon the world at large, but it also exposes the selfishness of the professional men :

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*He does so by referring to his "palsy", his "gout" his "five gray hairs" and his "ruined fortune".

> Soliders find wars, and Lawyers find out still
> Litigious men which quarrels move,
> Though she and I do love.

The lover has not stopped wars and law-suits and has not thus in any way affected the earnings of soliders and lawyers.

The lover's friend, it would seem, scolds the passionate couple for lacking in sense : he calls them night-moths dazzled by a light. This scolding turns the lover's ardour from satire to self-glorification. So far he has told others to mind their own business and proved the harmlessness of his own all-absorbing pursuit. That strain occurs again in the third stanza :

> Call her one, me another fly,
> We are tapers too, and at our own cost die.

This means : nobody would suffer a loss by the death of these lovers. But the main idea now is that of justification by love : "Call us what you will, we are made such by love" ; nay, more than justification, ennoblement : "And we in us find the Eagle and the Dove."

Probably the metaphor of the birds was suggested by that of the insects, and corrects it. In the erotic-mystical language of the time, the eagle stands for strength and the dove for tenderness and purity. But the metaphor of the Phoenix in the next line proceeds from that of the self-burning night-moth. With the Phoenix, Donne openly reverts to the type of traditional hyperbole he has just ridiculed, but he wears the hackneyed symbol with a difference :

> The Phoenix riddle hath more wit
> By us ; we two being one, are it.

The fabulous bird, being unique of its kind, united in itself both sexes. The two lovers, having combined into one "neutral"* being, have also acquired this other property of the Phoenix : they "die and rise the same" as before.

Here the friend should be imagined as objecting that, unless the poet means the metaphorical deaths and resurrections of parting and meeting again, he is straying very far from the truth : their love may well destroy the lovers, but not call them back to this world, not even provide them with a living while they are in it. The fourth stanza admits the hard fact, but answers defiantly : "We can die by it, if not live by love". The love of these lovers is a mystery. Therefore they will have a legend ; that is, their marvellous, but true, story will be written for the ennoblement of the faithful in coming times ; their fame will rest safely, if not in a chronicle, at least in "hymns". This last word, with its religious meaning, leads naturally to the announcement that the poet and his mistress will be "canonized for love", and here the fourth stanza ends. The friend this time probably opens his mouth to protest against the poet's arrogance amounting to blasphemy ; but the fourth stanza runs into the fifth, without a pause. The new-made saints are already invoked by lovers to come after them ; their help is prayed for in the most approved papistical style ; the repetition of the words "you whom", "you to whom......who" suggests a litany. Here Donne the lover turns to good account the learning of Donne the scholar and, in the impassioned subtleties of that imaginary address, the reader may well forget the friend who was the occasion of the poem. Yet without him, and unless we fill in his interruptions, we do not thoroughly realise why the lover-poet gradually warms up and passes from jesting impatience to an almost ecstatic vision.

**i.e.*, a hermaphrodite.

Examples of dramatic art in its most complex form. "The Flea". *The Flea* and *The Dream* show Donne's dramatic art in its most complex form. *The Flea* has been criticised again and again as Donne's worst offence against literary, if not against moral, propriety. But it seems that both those who praised and those who condemned this poem thought only of the hyperbolical conceits : in the second stanza the mingling of the lovers' blood in the flea is said to be almost a marriage : more that that, the flea becomes at once the woman, the man, the marriage-bed, and the wedding-church ; in killing it the poet's mistress would commit, not only murder on him, a crime to which she is accustomed, but also suicide and sacrilege. Yet there is cleverness of another kind in this poem. The scene it describes has the liveliness of the insect that plays here such a prominent part. In the poems already mentioned above, Donne gives us scenes with two characters in them. In *The Flea* we have a third character, much more real and active than the imaginary spectator in *The Ecstasy*. And while the painter might represent *The Apparition* in one picture, it would take a set of three pictures to reproduce the attitudes in *The Flea*—(1) The man is pointing to the insect that jumped from him on to her :

> Mark but this flea,...........
> It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee.

(2) The woman is hunting the flea, and perhaps has already caught it, but the man tries to dissuade her from putting it to death :

> Oh, stay, three lives in one flea spare.

(3) The woman has disregarded the man's petition and crushed the insect. A vivid contrast of colours is depicted :

> Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
> Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence ?

Whatever pity he may feel for the victim, the man does not forget his own plea. Indeed, the woman seems to have killed the insect less out of revenge than to vindicate the moral law questioned by the man on the strength of the insect's practice. He has told her that in the flea their two bloods had mingled and that the flea was their marriage-bed. By punishing the insect which has offended against her chastity, the woman has answered the man's argument ; but the man does not accept his defeat and undertakes to clear the memory of the insect he has failed to save :

> Wherein could this flea guilty be,
> Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee ?

And from the flea's innocence, he passes at once to the harmlessness of his own design upon the woman :

> Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
> Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

The Flea is good comedy, or good farce. Its humour may appear rather low to the modern mind, but it did not violate the rules of good breeding in Donne's time.

Skilful technique of "The Dream". Equally skilful in its technique, *The Dream* expresses, if not purer, at least more poetical feelings. The scene is a room, which we guess to be only dimly lit. The man is lying, if not in bed, at least on a couch. The woman comes in while he is dreaming of her, and sits by him. Her entrance wakes him and he thanks her for that. The dream was happy, but its theme suits a waking soul better than a sleeping soul. Yet her visit does not interrupt his dream, but continues it ; and he seizes upon the opportunity to pay a highly metaphysical compliment to his mistress : in God, being and intelligence are one ; similarly

> Thou art so truth, that thoughts of thee suffice,
> To make dreams truths ; and fables histories.

But the sensuous lover reappears at once, and we feel that the kind of truth he values so much might be called more clearly by the name of reality :

> Enter these arms, for since thou thought'st it best,
> Not to dream all my dream, let's act the rest.

The first stanza ends on this gesture of the man, one of gentle entreaty, arms outstretched, a fond smile on his lips and in his eyes.

The woman, it seems, remains seated, and out of reach. So the man tries to lure her forward. He tells her that, at first sight, he had thought her to be an angel but that he soon realised that *she* was *she*. While we read this second stanza, we keep on seeing the outstretched arms, and the couch ; and the metaphysical subtleties reveal themselves as amorous compliments.

In the third stanza the woman rises, not to draw nearer but to go away. This movement of the woman makes him doubt whether she is really she. Perhaps she is afraid of her own boldness. Perhaps she feels remorse already for risking her virtue. More likely she is a coquette and likes to play with fire. (Perhaps, we may add, she thinks the man rather tame, and laughs in her sleeve at his too intellectual a method of seduction). The invective against honour here reminds us of that in *The Damp*, but the tone is far more subdued. The lover's morality has not improved, but the dreamy atmosphere pervades his speech ; his fierceness has left him, at least temporarily ; even the woman's manoeuvre fails to rouse him. Yet, whatever estimate she may form of his softness, we see in it the proof of his genuine attachment. In *The Dream* Donne's dramatic art achieves its most delicate success.

Donne and Browning. Browning's admiration for his metaphysical predecessor has often been pointed out. There is a lot of resemblance between the two. *The Ecstasy* and the *Last Ride Together*, for instance, have much in common : they are both impassioned addresses spoken to interlocutors whose reactions we may guess. *My Last Duchess* and *The Canonization* show both Browning's likeness and unlikeness to Donne : in both poems we find a man telling his love-story to another whose questions or answers we are not allowed to know directly, but whose suppressed words, or gestures, or looks, are significant and add to our understanding of the situation. On the other hand, we see no touch in *The Canonization* of the local colour that is so prominent in *My Last Duchess*. The artistic imagination that could create some fifty characters in Browning's "Men and Women" in one collection of verse certainly played a small part as yet in the "Songs and Sonets" where it seldom, if ever, appeared unmixed with sentimental or intellectual self-expression. Nevertheless, the technique which Donne used to such effect remained substantially unaltered when it was resumed, after over two centuries, by Browning.

15

The Technique of Donne's Poetry

OR

Donne's Craftsmanship

Donne's revolt from Elizabethan sweetness of verse. An important fact about Donne is his conscious and emphatic revolt from the smooth sweetness of most Elizabethan verse. Although he had the power to utter harmonious and pleasing sounds, he seems to have deliberately adopted a harsh and often staccato method in order to break away from contemporary tradition. To smoothly flowing lines he often prefers those, freely divided, in which the accents have an effect of shock, which pull the reader up and awaken his attention. He introduces into rhymed verse such bold innovations as were customary in the blank verse of the dramatists :

> When thou knew'st *what* I dreamt, when thou knew'st *when*.

Characteristics of Donne's technique. From his peculiar poetic sensibility and technique, there flow egocentric and dramatic violence, passionate, ratiocination, concrete particularity and occasional ugliness of imagery, simplicity of language and complication of idea, ironic wit, and boldly expressive irregularities of rhythm.

Opinions expressed by Jonson and Swinburne.. Ben Jonson declared that for not keeping accent Donne deserved hanging. But Swinburne thus compared Donne and Ben Jonson : "Donne is rugged, Jonson is stiff. And if ruggedness of verse is a damaging blemish stiffness of verse is a destructive infirmity. Ruggudness is curable ; witness Donne's *Anniversaries*. Stiffness is incurable ; witness Jonson's *Underwoods*." It must be remembered that the harshness of Donne's *Satires* is a deliberate imitation of Persius ; the frequent harshnesses in his longer poems come from an attempt to force speech-rhythms on the verse-pattern ; many of his songs are melodious enough, and perhaps more might be found melodious if we had the tunes to which they had been set. But even the lyrics suggest a spoken rather than a sung poetry, spoken with a varying speed and emphasis. In some of the effects he achieved Donne was more in line with the dramatists than with the poets of his time.

The telling effect achieved by Donne. Donne writes verse which is far removed from Spenserian sweetness :

> I sing not, Siren like, to tempt ; for I
> Am harsh.

His verses, once rejected because of their roughness both of content and style, are indeed at the opposite pole from those of Spenser. A great writer fuses matter with manner so that the two become as one. Donne shows a capacity for doing so though his method is unusual. He ransacks science and learning for his vocabulary and his images. He seems almost to maltreat language, but only to achieve a more telling effect.

Elements of technique in "The Sun Rising". In *The Sun Rising* he gives us a most brilliant picture of early morning, of life in fact, in the opening stanza. In the whole of this stanza there is not one word which we would at once think of as "poetic", but several that are apparently not poetic—"fool", "pedantic", "saucy", "offices", "rags". Yet the effect is exhilarating, for the accumulation of sounds, running over a bouncing rhythm, produces a kind of onomatopeia. We hear the morning by a change of the familiar and disconnected noises into a musical analogy. Donne's poetry has a strong musical quality. But it is of a particular order. He is the master of discord. He rode over the conventions to penetrate and to express the deepest feelings.

The dramatic realism of Donne's style and versification. Donne was no believer in what is known as poetic diction. His handling of metrical effects makes his poetry hover between the singing voice of passion and the speaking voice of argument and expostulation. This dramatic realism of style and versification made him the idol of the first half of the 20th century. He was perhaps overpraised ; but at his best he gives, as almost no other poet does, the illusion that we are listening to the very accent of passion become conscious of its power. The following extracts from two of his poems may be quoted here as an illustration of this point :

> (1) Call us what you will, we are made such by love ;
> Call her one, me another fly,
> We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
> And we in us find the Eagle and the Dove.
> The Phoenix riddle hath more wit
> By us ; we two being one, are it. (*The Canonization*).

(2) Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it :
Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,
It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it :
But we will have a way more liberal
Than changing hearts, to join them, so we shall
Be one, and one another's All. (*Lovers' Infiniteness*)

Here is the stamp of true passion. Here Donne speaks from the very depths of his heart, and he speaks in a *speaking voice* ; (of course these passages show also Donne's genius for the use of conceit and paradox).

The talking voice and the spoken language. Utterance, movement, and intonation in Donne's poetry, says F.R. Leavis, are those of the talking voice. Leavis quotes the opening stanza of *The Good Morrow* ("I wonder by my troth, what thou and I/Did...... a dream of thee") and says that the pattern of the stanza becomes a means to the inevitable naturalness. Leavis also refers to the magnificant handling of the stanza, and the building up of varied cumulative effects within it, in *The Anniversary* and *A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day*. He admires the mastery of tone as exhibited in *Air and Angels*—the transition from the gravely gallant and conventional exaltation of the opening to the blandly insolent matter-of-factness of the close. The subtleties of Donne's use of the speaking voice and the spoken language, says Leavis, are inexhaustible. T.S. Eliot too admires Donne's conversational tone and Donne's use of conventional language in his poetry. The merit of Donne, says Eliot, is that he established a natural conversational diction instead of a conventional one. Donne effected not only a development but a reform of the language. The minor Elizabethan dramatists sometimes tormented the language ; where the content was often quite simple, the expression became perverse. In the verse of Donne the thought is sometimes over-ingenious and perverse, but the language is always pure and simple. "Donne introduced the natural or conversational style. He first made it possible to think in lyric verse, and in a variety of rhythms and stanza schemes, and at the same time retained a quality of song and the suggestion of the instrumental accompaniment of the earlier lyric. No poet has excelled him in this peculiar combination of qualities."

Variety of stanza-forms. Over and over again in the "Songs and Sonets" we find Donne not merely choosing but *inventing* the appropriate stanza-form for the poem he wants to write. A critic has calculated that out of the fortynine poems which are in stanzas no less than fortyfour are in stanza-forms which are not exactly repeated. In respect of this extreme metrical originality, the only other 17th century poet who can be compared with Donne is George Herbert. That same critic regards Donne as a true "craftsman" in poetry. Here, indeed, is yet one more paradox in a paradoxical career—the fact that Donne, who did not write for publication, and who never regarded poetry as the serious business of his life, evidently bestowed more care and pains upon his poems than many poets for whom poetry has been a whole-time occupation.

Dramatic openings. A poem by Donne often opens in a manner that is dramatic, startling, and highly original. Here are some memorable openings :

(1) For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love :
(The Canonization)

(2) Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name. *(Air and Angels)*

(3) I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Who died before the god of Love was born : *(Love's Deity)*

(4) Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us ?
(The Sun Rising)

The reader's attention is immediately arrested by such abrupt openings, with their colloquial phrasing, and he inevitably reads on.

Irregularities in versification. "Never has the English heroic metre suffered as at Donne's hands. He wrote so-called couplets, but allowed himself to drag the sense from one line to the next in the most violent manner and to make the most singular divisions of his line. More than this, he violates the iambic rhythm over and over again and many of his lines cannot be scanned. When he rhymes unaccented syllables, the fact may be attributed to archaism, but with little probability, since he aimed at modernism and a reproduction of the inflections of everyday speech. It is rather that he despised the laws of versification."

Technique of Donne's Satires. But Donne's Satiric verse shows something like a consistent effort to avoid a couplet structure, and to give to his verse the freedom and swiftness of movement to which even dramatic blank verse had hardly yet attained. He uses all the devices—the main pause in the middle of the line, weak and light endings (he even divides one word between two lines)—by which Shakespeare secured the abrupt, rapid effects of the verse of *Macbeth* and the later plays. His verse is not smooth or melodious ; yet the effect is deliberate and quite appropriate to the theme and the spirit of the poem. If there is one thing more distinctive than another of Donne's best work, it is the closeness with which the verse echoes the sense and soul of the poems. The abrupt and harsh verse of his Satires reflects the spirit in which they were written. Here the expression, though condensed and harsh, is always precise.

The use of conceits. The use of conceits is an integral part of Donne's poetic technique. To the average reader of poetry Donne is best known by his use of conceits, *i.e.*, far-fetched ideas, images, similes, metaphors, etc. Conceits came naturally to Donne's mind. He did not have to strain himself to find conceits though we have to strain ourselves in order to understand them. He introduces a conceit and then elaborates it, or he modifies it, alters it, twists it and so on. Most of his conceits show his fertile and inexhaustible wit which is their source. The play of his wit sometimes results in astounding hyperbole. Conceits were no doubt used by poets prior to Donne. But they did not use conceits in such abundance ; nor were their conceits so bold, daring, and original. Donne certainly makes use of some of the familiar and hackneyed conceits also : for instance, a lover give his heart to his beloved (*The Message*) ; the beloved is a murderess who kills her lover by her cruetly or hard-heartedness (*The Apparition*) ; the lover may die of an excess of joy if the beloved responds to his love, and he may die of disappointment if she hates him (*The Prohibition*) ; both the lover and the beloved may die if they part (*The Expiration*). But many are the conceits which had never before found their way into poetry, and some of them are really startling or shocking or fantastic : Thus the lover is a whole world to his beloved and she is a whole world to him ; not only that, they are two perfect hemispheres who together constitute the world (*The Good Morrow*). The lover can eclipse and cloud the sun with one wink ; the beloved lying in the bed by the lover's side is to him both the West and the East Indies ; the beloved is all States and the lover is all Princes (*The Sun Rising*). The lovers are the Eagle and the Dove, and "The Phoenix riddle hath more wit by them ;" the lovers will be canonized and invoked by future lovers (*The Canonization*). The lovers are kings for each other and they are themselves the subjects (*The Anniversary*). The poet's tears should be used as a criterion by which to judge whether other lovers' mistresses are shedding true or false tears (*Twickenham Garden*). A flea's sucking a tiny drop of blood from the lover's body and then from the beloved's body means that the two have got married, and the flea is their marriage temple as well as their marriage bed (*A Flea*). The souls of the lover and the beloved are like a pair of compasses—they may be two but in essence they are one (*A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*). The souls of the lover and the beloved come out of their bodies, negotiate with each other and then return to the bodies—a truly metaphysical conceit in the literal sense of the word "metaphysical" (*The Ecstasy*). Sometimes the conceits are so odd that we lose sight of the thing to be illustrated, in the startling nature of the illustration. With him love is a spider which dropped into the wine of life turns it to poison (*Twickenham Garden*) ; or love is a cannon-ball :

> "By him as by chain'd shot, whole ranks do die ;

or it is a devouring fish :

> "He is the tyrant pike, our hearts the fry."

This fashion of "conceitful" writing, somewhat like euphuism in prose, appeared in Italy and Spain also. (Its imaginative exuberance has its parallels in baroqe architecture and painting).

Donne's verse is intermittenly overcast with dark imagery and charged with queer scientific tropes which reflect obliquely his philosophic doubts and anxiety. His art consists in finding an emotional equivalent for these intellectual gropings ; in creating, by means of sensuous images, a single poetic image of the material, sensible, and spiritual world of his experience. Faith and reason are perpetually in conflict in his verse and both are reinforced by supporting evidence drawn from patristic and scholastic writers. The weight of his learning is formidable and at times indeed overwhelming.

Donne's uncouthness. Donne's lack of conventional smoothness, one might say deliberate disregard for the orthodox poetical properties of his age, must have seemed very awkward to ears attuned to Spenser and the formal sonneteers. To an older generation, brought up on the sonnets and blank verse of Wyatt and Surrey Donne's uncouthness must have seemed as reprehensible as Hardy's peculiar ruggedness did to a generation accustomed to the mellifluous flow of Tennyson's and Swinburne's verse, or as the rhythms of *The Waste Land* to the admirers of Rupert Brooke and Flecker

Coleridge's view. Coleridge was the first to point out a purpose and significance in Donne's metric. "To read Dryden, Pope, etc." he wrote, "you need only count syllables ; but to read Donne you must measure *time*, and discover the time of each word by the sense of passion". He expressed the same thing in rather more specific terms, in a note on the *Song* : "Sweetest love, I do not go" which is the most regular of all Donne's poems. "This beautiful and perfect poem", says Coleridge, "proves by its title 'Song', that all Donne's poems are equally *metrical*, though *smoothness*, that is to say the meter necessitating the proper reading, be deemed appropriate to *songs* ; but, in poems where the author *thinks*, and expects the reader to do so, the sense must be understood in order to ascertain the metre."

How to read Donne's poems. To read Donne aright is largely a matter of practice, which may involve a good deal of perseverance and patience before one can enjoy his verse. The punctuation is an important guide, and Donne intended it to perform the same service as rests in musical notation. Experience in reading will reveal, progressively, the correct value of each stressed word, and a recognition of these values leads, almost insensibly, to an understanding of the metrical scheme, which is seldom confined by the rhythm of a single line but extends into paragraphs. When the sense is obscure and the metre consequently uncertain, it is often helpful to read the whole poem aloud, for **subtleties of syntax and rhythm** which escape the eye may sometimes be caught in the ear or on the tongue. Some harshness and dissonance, however, will remain. The fact is that Donne was more interested in sense than in sound and that he was careless about co-ordinating the two **Almost all his poems are dramatic monologues uttered in a mood of passionate apprehension**. The passion draws together the words of common speech and attempts sometimes to fuse the incoherent. Donne did not stop to recast or refine. There is no "poetic diction", no use of polish, no compromise with the kind of music to the accompaniment of which the lyrics of Donne's contemporaries were commonly sung.

Donne's early poems reflect a life in which every sensation that offered was seized and passionately analysed. It is the element of passion in the analysis that gives these poems their grandeur. The manner of the poems is **dramatic**, and reproduces the **irregular rhythms, the sudden emphatic speech of intense emotion.** Underlying even the hightest play of wit there is this bewildered turbulence of feeling.

Scott's criticism. "Sir Walter Scott in his *Life of Dryden* condemned Donne as harsh and scholastic, pedantic", spoke of "the unprofitable trade of combining dissimilar and repugnant ideas", and compared Donne's poems to "barbarous, jingling, ill-regulated prose", little different from "the inscription on a tombstone. This is very bitter criticism in a man of Scott's disposition, but it doubtless represented the view of many of his contemporaries. In addition to Scott's criticism, we have Jonson's humorously blunt comment. "For not keeping of accent, Jack Donne deserved hanging" Now, it cannot be denied that Donne's line is frequently harsh, uneven, and poor in musical quality. But in the writing of poetry there are many forms of excellence, and few poets combine them all. The quality of Donne's metre is partly explained by the fact that he was in revolt against the formal hyperboles of courtly love-poetry. Ladies, accustomed to poetic lovers who languished for years in flowery wooing, must have been shocked by the forthrightness of Donne's

> The honesties of love with ease I do,
> But am no porter for a tedious woo.

Or

> For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love.

Harsh, impetuous, passionate utterance. Donne's characteristic manner cannot, however, be attributed merely to a reaction against an earlier and sweeter style. His method is the true and unaltering handwriting of the man. His style shows his essential spirit and his unique individuality. A Donne who had the metrical felicity of Spenser would not be the Donne we admire. The true utterance of Donne is a harsh, impetuous, passionate speech, a rapid alternation between nervous razor-sharp wit and sudden revealing sincerity. The nature of his poetry demanded a metre less formal than the examples which he could have copied. He uses snatches of conversation, dramatic interjections, agile transformations of wit, and the device of "thinking aloud" to create the impression of a personal voice speaking either to the individual reader or in overheard communion with himself. In some of the best poems the effects are truly dramatic, closely related to stage dialogue. Very little of the emotion is "recollected in tranquillity" : it is felt in the texture of the poem, as something acted in dramatic representation. The harsh and uneven accents break up the monotony of fluent perfection, and suggest the spontaneity of immediate utterance.

The combination of "dissimilar and repugnant ideas", to which Sir Walter Scott objected, is another aspect of Donne's technique ; and it is best understood as a development of Elizabethan metaphor. The dramatists, in particular, used metaphors and similes to reinforce the impression made on the audience, and to provide a pause in thinking for slower minds. The Elizabethans were great explorers, in literature as well as in life, and Donne was tireless in examining, comparing and contrasting the items of his knowledge, until they threw new light on each other. Nowhere is this "conceited" blend of wit and feeling so admirably formed as in the poem *A Valedic tion : Forbidding Mourning*. Here Donne, who has to go abroad, compares his wife and himself to the feet of a pair of compasses which are in perfect unison, though one "in the centre sit" and the other "far doth roam". The whole poem well illustrates Donne's method at its best.

To the unsophisticated, to the conventional and the slow-witted, to the sheltered simplicity of the unquestioning mind, Donne seems harsh and obscure and repellent. To those, however, whose minds have been quickened by despair and doubt, whose worldly experience is as passionately vivid as it is tantalizing, and who above all can value the finer clarifications of a superb wit, Donne will always be one of the rarest treasures of English literature.

A comment on Donne's versification. Here is an illuminating comment : "Something must be said about Donne's versification, since this has aroused the notice of critics of all time, from those of Donne himself to the present day. Nearly all critics, from Jonson and Dryden to the romantics and Victorians, have felt it necessary to comment on, and in some cases excuse, what they have called the 'harshness' of Donne's verse. This is because the ideal has at all times been a Spenserian smoothness. This Donne deliberately avoided ; either he could not write smoothly or he did not care to The metrical roughness of some of his lines, the violent departures from the rhythmic pattern, the angularity of his style are a deliberate reflection of his erratic and nervous temperament. Of no writer is it truer to say that the style is the man. Donne's rhythms, his vocabulary—at times so odd, at times so simple, the twists and perplexities of his syntax, his metaphors and paradoxes, his unpredictable vagaries of thought and feeling—there are Donne's poetry. To wish that he had written differently is to wish that he had been a different man, or that he had not fully realized himself. It has been pointed out that he prepared none of his poems for the press and that if he had done so he would have smoothed out some of the irregularities. This last is a vary doubtful assumption. Equally doubtful is the assumption that his poems would thus have been improved."

Detailed Co
Poems

[Note. The origi
has been retained]

Marke but this
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    Just so much
    Will wast, as

PART TWO

Detailed Consideration of Selected Poems with their Text

[Note. The original spelling in the text of these poems has been retained]

1. The Flea

Marke but this flea, and marke in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is ;
Mee it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee ;
Confesse it, this cannot be said
A sinne, or shame, or losse of maidenhead,
    Yet this enjoyes before it wooe,
    And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two,
    And this, alas, is more than wee would doe.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where wee almost, nay more than maryed are :
This flea is you and I, and this
Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is ;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloysterd in these living walls of jet
    Though use make thee apt to kill mee,
    Let not to this, selfe murder added bee,
    And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three.

Cruell and sodaine, hast thou since
Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence ?
In what could this flea guilty bee,
Except in that drop which it suckt from thee ?
Yet thou triumph'st, and saist that thou
Find'st not thy selfe, nor mee the weaker now ;
    'Tis true, then learne how false, feares bee ;
    Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee,
    Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee.

Critical Appreciation. A metaphysical poem seeks to build up a sense of intellectual and intelligible order out of a number of disparate images. The images are apparently unrelated and it has been argued by Dr. Johnson and others, unrelatable. The metaphysical poet, nevertheless, brings these images into a relationship. The basis of the poem that results is not musical and decorative, but intellectual and ideal : ideal in the sense of that word's connection with idea : "ideal" as opposed to "real". Donne said that he described the *idea* of a woman, and not the woman as she was. Plato's philosophy presupposes an idea behind every actual thing in the world. According to this philosophy, behind every observation about love, there is the concept of love itself.

Donne has written a poem about a flea. What can be more real than such a subject ? An early Elizabethan would not have written a lyric about a flea, for his aim was, in a lyric or song, to idealise the real, to decorate it with appropriate verbal beauties, with which such a subject would have been incompatible. But Donne's aim was to realise the ideal ; and, as Plato said, the ideal can only be approached through the real which is in fact its shadow. Donne's flea does not remain a flea for long : it has bitten and sucked the blood of both the poet and his beloved ; so

> This flea is you and I, and this
> Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is......

It is not merely decorated with verbal felicities : wit has translated it. (Cowley, in his famous definition of wit, spoke of "primitive forms", the prime absolute ideas of God). The flea is seen as one of the million created objects of this life, all equal because they all add up to the created world, and all capable of being related to seemingly disparate things. Donne is intensely modern in his psychological realism : but behind his vivid presentation of our material world, organising it and enabling him to choose what he wants and connect as he wants, is his Renaissance belief in ideas as the true reality of a thinking man, the only begetters of those earthly shadows in the midst of which we live and die. It is that which makes his realism possible and gives it its power not merely to startle and convince, but to thrill and move us.

The Flea has been admired not for qualities which many modern critics have taught us to look for in poetry—self-expression, self-revelation, sincerity, etc. It has been admired for its sheer wit, for the astonishing fact that Donne was able to write three stanzas, twentyseven lines, of close-knit and consecutive argument on such an apparently unpromising subject as a flea-bite, and to extract from it such an ingenious and elaborate simile as that about the flea, in which their bloods are mingled, being their marriage-bed and marriage-temple, so that if she kills the insect she will be committing, firstly, murder (through killing the poet in it), secondly, suicide (through killing herself in it), and thirdly, sacrilege (through destroying the temple or church in which they were married). It was the very triviality of the subject which made the triumph of Donne's wit seem so surprising.

Conceits in this poem. 1. The mingling of the poet's blood with his beloved's blood in the body of the flea is regarded as the physical union or marriage of the poet and his beloved. The two have already become one.

2. The flea is regarded as the marriage-bed, as also the marriage-temple, for the poet and his beloved who are now "cloister ed" in the body of the insect.

3. The killing of the flea will mean destroying three lives—those of the poet, his beloved, and the insect. It will also be an act of sacrilege because a temple will be destroyed.

4. Let the beloved surrender her body to the poet because she will, by doing so, lose just as little honour as the life she has lost by a drop of her blood having been sucked by the flea.

These are all examples of "fantastic" conceits.

NOTES

Stanza I. *Marke but this flea......which thou deny'st me is* (Lines 1-2). Just observe this flea, and notice how small is the thing which you are refusing me. (The poet is addressing his beloved who has so far refused to yield to him. She has her own moral scruples, but the poet wants her to surrender her body to him. He is going to prove to her that the surrender of her body to him is a very small matter and that, therefore, she should not persist in her refusal).

Mee it suck'd first......losse of maidenhead (Lines 3-6). This flea first sucked a tiny drop of blood from my body, and afterwards it sucked a tiny drop of blood from your body. That means that your blood and my blood have mingled in the body of this flea. You are well aware that the mingling of our bloods in this manner cannot be called a sin, or a matter of shame for either of us. Nor yet can it be said that you have lost your virginity. (*maidenhead*—virginity).

Yet this enjoyes before it wooe (Line 7). Yet this flea has enjoyed the pleasure of sucking your blood without having courted you. No preliminary advances were necessary on the part of the flea before it sucked your blood and in this way enjoyed the pleasure of a physical union with you.

And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two (Line 8). The flea has fed itself with your blood and with my blood which have both mingled in its body. The flea is now fatter than before and it is filled with pride. (*pampered*—fed).

And this, alas ! is more than wee would doe (Line 9). It is regrettable that you and I cannot do what this flea has done. The flea has enjoyed a physical union with you, and our two bloods have mingled in its body. But you are unwilling that we should enjoy the pleasure of a physical union.

Stanza II. *Oh stay, three lives......in these living walls of jet* (Lines 10-15). O stop, do not kill this flea. If you kill it, you will be killing three lives. This flea is not only itself, but it is you and I also. If you spare its life, you will be sparing my life and your own life too. There is a little of my blood in it, and there is a little of your blood in it, and thus it contains both your life and mine. Not only that, in the body of this flea we have already got married. Marriage means the union of two bodies. Our bloods having mingled in the body of this flea, we are already married, and the body of the flea may be regarded as our marriage-bed. Furthermore, the body of this flea may be regarded as a church where the ceremony of our marriage has taken place. Your parents may be unwilling to let you marry me, and you may yourself be unwilling to surrender your body to me. But we have already met within the body of this black flea and we are now shut inside it. (*These living walls of jet*—the black body of the flea. The word "jet" has several meanings, one of which implies black colour).

Though use make thee apt to kill mee (Line 16). Although killing me may not be something unusual for you, because you have always been killing me with your cruelty.

Let not to this, selfe murder added bee (Line 17). To my murder, you should not add your own murder. By killing the flea, you will not be killing me but yourself also. It will be my murder and your suicide.

And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three (Line 18). You will be committing an impious act because you will be destroying our marriage temple. In this way you will be committing three sins. (1) My murder. (2) You suicide. (3) Wrecking a marriage temple. (*sacrilege*—an impious act ; violating the sanctity of something.

Stanza III. *Cruell and sodaine......innocence* ? (Lines 19-20). How suddenly and cruelly, alas, have you killed the flea ! Your nails are now red with the blood of the flea which was an innocent creature. (*purpled*—reddened ; crimsoned with blood).

In what could this flea......from thee ? (Lines 21-22). How could you hold this flea to be guilty of any crime ? Its only crime was that it sucked a drop of your blood. This was not a very serious matter.

Yet thou triumph'st......the weaker now (Lines 23-24). Yet you consider yourself to be triumphant, and you claim that you find neither yourself nor me to be in any way weaker by the loss of those drops of blood which the flea sucked.

'Tis true, then learne how false, feares bee......life from thee (Lines 25-57). You are right. Neither you nor I am weaker by the loss of that blood. From this you should learn that any fears that you may have about surrendering yourself to me are false. If the loss of this blood has made no difference to you or to me, your fears about surrendering your body to me are meaningless. After all, how

much of honour will you lose, if you yield to me and let me satisfy my desire for you ? You will lose just as little honour as the blood that this flea sucked from you. You yourself say that the flea, which you have killed, took hardly any life from you because you are not at all feeling weaker than before. The amount of honour that you will lose by yielding to me will be as insignificant as the life that the flea took from you.

2. The Good-Morrow

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd ? were we not wean'd till then ?
But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly ?
Or snorted we i' the seaven sleepers den ?
'Twas so ; But this, all pleasures fancies bee.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, 'twas but a dreame of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking soules,
Which watch not one another out of feare ;
For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome, an every where.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let Maps to others, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possesse our world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,
Where can we finde two better hemispheares
Without sharpe North, without declining West ?
What ever dyes, was not mixt equally ;
If our two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.

Critical Appreciation. *The Good-Morrow* is a passionate love-poem. It is also a poem of contentment. The mood of the poem is one of joy, because the subject is love which has been fulfilled. Indeed, the poem celebrates a perfect love. The two lovers are, in effect, one and together they constitute a whole world of which they are the possessors ;

"Let us possess our world, each hath one, and is one." The poet and his beloved are two better hemispheres than the hemispheres of which this earth is composed :

> Where can we find two better hemispheres
> Without sharp North without declining West ?

With reference to the use of the words "sharp" and "declining" in the lines above, a critic has praised Donne for "the selection of single adjectives to do the duty of a whole train of surplusage."

The poet claims immortality for himself and his beloved on the ground that their two loves (*i,e.*, love for each other) are "one" and that they love each other equally. This is thus a unique kind of love.

The opening of the poem is abrupt and dramatic, and it has attracted the notice of most critics by its arresting quality :

> I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
> Did, till we lov'd ?

All other pleasures, says the poet, are a mere fancy as compared to the pleasure of his love for his beloved. All other women whose love the poet has enjoyed before were only dim reflections of this woman who thus represents perfection :

> If ever any beauty I did see,
> Which I desir'd and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

Their love makes the lovers self-sufficient : they do not need to look at other sights, and their bed-room is a microcosm of the whole world.

It is one of those poems by Donne which are free from bitterness, grief, and cynicism. There is neither frustration here, nor disgust, nor jealousy. The note of unadulterated joy runs through the whole poem. And it is a poem of delight for the reader too.

The following comment on the poem is noteworthy : "And in *The Good-Morrow* the dramatic and colloquial opening lines lead, quite naturally and without any sense of straining or exaggeration, to a comparison, a suggested, fleeting comparison of her to that Platonic* arche-type of which all earthly beauties are but dim reflections, and then of her and himself, first to two perfect hemispheres, and then to one simple substance, indestructible because irreducible to anything less primary and elemental than it already is."

Conceits in the poem. A conceit is a fanciful idea, image, or comparison. Sometimes a conceit is a very far-fetched idea, something completely divorced from realities. Donne often gives us unusual, bold, and daring conceits. His conceits often startle, astonish, shock, and even baffle us. The fantastic or perverse quality of some of his conceits has provoked both favourable and unfavourable comments.

The conceits in this poem may briefly be indicated. They are as follows :

(1) Before falling in love, these lovers were asleep, but now their souls have woke up (and they bid "good-morrow" to each other).

(2) The two lovers constitute one whole world of which they are the possessors.

(3) The two lovers are two perfect hemispheres which know no change or decline.

(4) These lovers cannot die because they love each other equally and their *two* loves are *one*.

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*Plato was of the view that all beauty that we see in this world is an imperfect reflection of the perfect or ideal beauty which exists in the world of ideas.

It will be noted that none of these ideas or notions is *realistic.* They are all the product of fancy.

NOTES

Stanza I. *I wonder by my troth...till we lov'd ?*—I swear that I do not know what you and I used to do till we fell in love with each other. Indeed, it surprises me to think what you and I could have been doing till we fell in love. (*Troth*—truth, *by my troth*—truly ; indeed ; I swear)

Were we not wean'd...childishly ?—Were we still children till then, and did we enjoy only rustic pleasures till we fell in love ? Were we like children, fed on simple, elementary pleasures of life till we fell in love ? Love is the chief pleasure of life, but what were we doing before falling in love ? (*wean'd*—Literally, the word means a child's being stopped from feeding on its mother's breast. A child is weaned from the mother's breast when it has grown to be one or two years old. The poet means to say that perhaps he and his beloved had not grown to adulthood till they fell in love).

Or snorted we in the seaven sleepers' den ?— Or were we sleeping and snoring in the seven sleepers' cave till we fell in love ? Perhaps we slept for a long long time and it was only when we woke up that we started making love to each other. (*Seven sleepers' den*—Seven noble brothers of Ephesus hid themselves in a cave in order to escape the persecution of Christians by the Emperor Decius in 251 A.D. The entrance of the cave was blocked up. The seven men slept there for nearly two hundred years and they then came out, still youths, in the reign of the younger Theodosius).

'Twas so ; but this,...but a dreame of thee—The explanation given by me is correct, namely, that we must have been asleep for a long time. But I can say this with confidence that all other pleasures in this world are a mere fancy. Only the pleasure of our love is real. If ever I did see any other beautiful woman whom I desired and whom I got, she was only a reflection of you. You and your beauty are real ; all other beautiful women, who have satisfied my desire, were unreal like a dream.

Stanza II, *And now good-morrow...out of feare*—Now our sleep has come to an end and we are awake. Our hearts and souls are awake, and we wish them good morning and all happiness. Our souls do not watch each other out of fear or suspicion. We have no reason to feel afraid of anything or to feel suspicious of each other.

For love all love...an every where—The prose-form of the first line here would be : "For love controls all love of other sights", meaning that when two persons are in love, they do not feel interested in any other sight (except the sight of each other). Our love for each other makes us desire each other to such an extent that we would not like to see any other sight. We would like to remain close to each other and, though we are in a small room, this room is a microcosm of the whole world. Being in this little room we are "everywhere", because the pleasure of our loving each other includes all other joys and pleasures of this world.

Let sea-discoverers...and is one—Let sailors and explorers discover new worlds. Let cartographers draw maps showing more and more worlds. So far as you and I are concerned, we need only one world and each of us has got that world You are one world in yourself, and I am another world in myself, but we together constitute one single world which is enough for us. We do not have to go anywhere else, and we do not have to look at any other world.

Stanza III. *My face in thine eyes...in the faces rest*—My face is reflected in your eyes. Your face is reflected in my eyes. The reflections of our faces in each other's eyes reveal our simple and true hearts. We are true to each other, and our mutual sincerity appears in our faces the reflection of which we can see in each other's eyes.

Where can we finde...without declining West—We together con stitute a complete world, you being one hemisphere of it, and I being the other hemisphere. No better hemispheres than you and I exist anywhere. You and I are better hemispheres even than the hemispheres of the earth. The earth's hemispheres suffer from flaws: for instance, it is so cold at the north pole of the earth that no life can exist there ; the west is where the sun sets, and the west is thus a symbol of decline. In other words, both the north and the west are suggestive of decline and death. But you and I are flawless. You and I are not subject to decline or death.

What ever dyes, was not mixt equally—If anything dies in this world, it is because the combination of elements in it is not harmonious. If there is a harmonious combination of elements in anything, it will never die.

If our two loves be one...none can die—Your love and my love are one. In other words, you and I constitute one being. When we are together, we are not two separate persons but only one. Besides, we love each other equally, and we love each other so, firmly that neither of us can waver or slow down. If that be so, neither of us can die. Our love for each other being equal, we shall not die be cause we fulfil the condition of immortality, namely, that the mixture of elements in a person should be harmonious.

3 Song

Goe, and catche a falling starre,
    Get with child a mandrake roote,
Tell me, where all past yeares are,
    Or who cleft the Divels foot,
Teach me to heare Mermaides singing,
    Or to keep off envies stinging,
    And finde
    What winde

Serves to'advance an honest minde.

If thou beest borne to strange sights,
Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand daies and nights,
Till age snow white haires on thee,
Thou, when thou retorn'st, wilt tell mee
All strange wonders that befell thee,
And sweare
No where
Lives a woman true, and faire.

If thou findst one, let mee know,
Such a Pilgrimage were sweet ;
Yet doe not, I would not goe,
Though at next doore wee might meet,
Thou shee were true, when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter,
Yet shee
Will bee
False, ere I come, to two, or three.

Critical Appreciation. The subject of this poem is the inconstancy of women. According to the poet, no beautiful woman can be true in love. To find a beautiful woman, who is also true, would be as impossible as catching a falling star, or getting with child a mandrake root, or finding out where all the past years have gone, or who cleft the devil's foot, or hearing mermaids sing, or avoiding the sting of jealousy. A man may have the power to see invisible things. But even such a man will not be able to find a woman who is both beautiful and true, though he may undertake a long journey lasting ten thousand days and nights. Even if a woman who is true and fair could be found, she will, in a very short time, prove false to two or three lovers. In other words, even the truest woman will not be perfectly faithful or constant in her love.

This poem shows one of the characteristic moods of Donne *vis-a-vis* the subject of love and women. The poem is written in a sceptical and cynical frame of mind. The poet here debunks beautiful women. He has written a sharp and witty satire on beautiful women. He mocks at their inconstancy and fickle-mindedness. The poem is written in a light-hearted, jesting, mood. The attitude of the poet here is similar to that in such pieces as *Love's Alchemy*, *The Message*, and *The Legacy*.

NOTES

Stanza I. *A mandrake roote* (Line 2)—A mandrake is a plant the root of which resembles the human figure. (See the detailed explanation of "mandrake" in the notes on the poem, *Twickenham Garden*). But, though resembling the human figure, the mandrake root cannot beget a child or become pregnant with a child. The idea of a mandrake root becoming pregnant with a child is most fantastic and absurd

Or who cleft the Divel's foot (Line 4)—In the Middle Ages the devil was depicted as having cloven feet, but who was responsible for cleaving the devil's feet nobody knows. What is meant by cloven feet can be understood by taking a look at the feet of, say, a goat.

Teach me to heare Mermaides singing (Line 5)—Mermaids are imaginary creatures living in the sea. They are half-women and half-fish (the upper portion of their bodies being that of a woman, and the portion below the waist being that of a fish). Mermaids are believed to be capable of singing sweet songs. Nobody has heard mermaids singing, because mermaids simply do not exist.

Or to keep off envies stinging.—The pangs of jealousy cannot be kept off by any method whatsoever. Jealousy is part of human nature, and the stings of jealousy are inescapable.

And finde.........an honest minde (Lines 7-9)—If you can do any of the above (impossible) things, you may be able to find which climate is favourable to promote honesty or constancy in a woman. In other words, it is impossible to conceive of any climate in which women are faithful in their love.

Stanza II. *If thou beest borne.........true and faire* (Lines 10-18).—If you have an inborn capacity to see marvellous sights and invisible things, make a journey lasting many years, till you become aged and your hair turns white like snow. When you return from this long journey, you will give me an account of all the strange things and happenings that you came across. But you will swear that you never found anywhere a woman who was both beautiful and true in love. No beautiful woman can ever be constant in love.

Stanza III. *If thou findst one.........to two, or three* (Lines 19-27).—If you do come across a woman who is both beautiful and true in love, let me know about her. I would gladly undertake a journey to go and meet such a woman, and my journey will be sacred like a pilgrimage. And yet do not tell me about her. I would not go to see such a woman even if she were living in the next house to me. It is possible that she was true when you met her. She might even continue to be true till you complete the love letter that you are writing to her. But, by the time I reach there she will have been false to two or three other lovers.

4. The Undertaking

I have done one braver thing
Than all the *Worthies* did,
Yet a braver thence doth spring,
Which is, to keepe that hid.
It were but madnes now t'impart
The skill of specular stone,
When he which can have learn'd the art
To cut it, can finde none.
So, if I now should utter this,
Others (because no more

Such stuffe to worke upon, there is,)
Would love but as before.

But he who lovelinesse within
Hath found, all outward loathes,
For he who colour loves, and skinne,
Loves but their oldest clothes.

If, as I have, you also doe
Vertue'attir'd in woman see,
And dare love that, and say so too,
And forget the Hee and Shee ;

And if this love, though placed so,
From prophane men you hide,
Which will no faith on this bestow,
Or, if they doe, deride :

Then you'have done a braver thing
Than all the *Worthies* did :
And a braver thence will spring,
Which is, to keepe that hid.

Critical Appreciation. The poet claims to have done a braver deed than anything done by the noblest of men. And even braver than his own brave deed is that he has kept it a secret. The brave deed he has done is to have found a woman who is the very embodiment of virtue. And he has dared to love her. There would be no point in his describing that woman. Another woman like her does not exist and, even if he were to describe the one he has found, other men would not be able to find the like of her and would have to go back to their previous inferior mistresses. True love is not the love of the body but of the soul. Love of inward virtue makes the love of the body seem loathsome. So if anybody else finds a virtuous woman, let him love her and tell her that he loves her. But he should not tell about her to profane (or, worldly-minded) men because they would either disbelieve him or make fun of him. Loving such a woman and keeping this love a secret is a most courageous act.

The word "undertaking" in the title refers to the act of loving a woman of virtue and keeping this love a secret from profane men. The poet here draws a distinction between loving a woman for her virtue and loving a woman for her flesh or body. It is not often that Donne sings of a woman's virtue. Here we find him in an unusual mood. He here depicts himself almost as a Platonic lover (who believes in the union of souls rather than the union of bodies). Here Donne seeks "virtue attir'd in woman" (line 18). But his characteristic cynicism reveals itself when he declares that another woman like the one he has found is impossible to find just as it is impossible to find a magic stone even if one knows the art of cutting such a stone. The idea gains in emphasis and force because of the simile of the magic stone.

Thus Donne has found the ideal woman (not in the physical, but in the spiritual, sense). She is unique, a paragon of virtue. The female sex cannot boast of another like her. The poem is far from being a tribute to the female sex as a whole. It is the glorification of one single woman, and this glorification is the conceit on which the poem is based. The poem is a combination of a hyperbolic statement and a cynical statement.

NOTES

Braver thing (line 1). more courageous deed ; more remarkable action.

The Worthies (line 2). This is a reference to the nine most celebrated warriors from Hector to Geoffrey of Boulogne. They are famous for their prodigious deeds. (The poet is indulging in a hyperbole by declaring his deed as being superior to the deeds of those heroes).

Specular stone (line 6). A kind of magic stone ; an imaginary stone believed to be excellently suited for construction. However, some critics point out that this stone did exist in ancient times and was employed for building temples with transparent walls. A great skill was needed to cut this stone in strips for use.

Lovelinesse within (line 13). inner goodness ; moral virtue,

All outward loathes (line 14). hates all outward or merely physical beauty.

Vertue attir'd in woman (line 17). virtue appearing in the shape of a woman.

Prophane men (line 21). profane or worldly-minded men.

Or, if they doe, deride (line 23). Or, even if they believe you, they will merely mock at you. Such men will make fun of you for ving any woman just in a spiritual sense. They believe only in sexual pleasure or physical satisfaction.

5. The Sunne Rising

Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us ?
Must to thy motions lovers seasons run ?
Sawcy pedantique wretch, goe chide
Late schoole boyes, and sowre prentices,
Goe tell Court-huntsmen, that the King will ride,
Call countrey ants to harvest offices ;
Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,
Nor houres, dayes, months, which are the rags of time.
Thy beames, so reverend, and strong
Why shouldst thou thinke ?
I could eclipse and cloud them with a winke,

But that I would not lose her sight so long ·
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Looke, and to morrow late, tell mee,
Whether both the'India's of spice and Myne
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee,
Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt heare, All here in one bed lay.

She'is all States, and all Princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes doe but play us ; compar'd to this
All honor's mimique ; All wealth alchimie.
Thou sunne art halfe as happy'as wee,
In that the world's contracted thus ;
Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee
To warme the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art every where ;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare.

Critical Appreciation. *The Sun Rising* is, in the first place an amusing, witty, "clever" poem. It is light verse, but it is also extremely serious. It is, in fact, a good example of the fact that seriousness is different from solemnity and may be accompanied with a good deal of frivolity.

This poem also illustrates Donne's revolt against the artificiality and absurdity of the fashionable love poetry of courtly chivalry in which the conceit of the beloved's eyes being regarded as brighter than the sun had long become a tedious formula. Donne laughs at the hyperboles or the fantastic exaggerations of the courtly poetry by pretending to accept them. He piles hyperbole on hyperbole and praises his mistress in the most extravagant manner.

But the poem is not intended to be merely literary satire. It is a genuine and sincere expression of the poet's deep sense of the beauty and perfection of his loved one. Its final objective is to express the poet's feeling of happiness and completeness in the possession of his mistress. She is so all-perfect, all-lovely, all-complete that she, and she alone, justifies the fantastic hyperboles of courtly poetry.

The tone of the poem, and the changes and developments o the tone, are of great importance. The poem begins with a rhetorical arrogant address to the sun. Like many of Donne's poems, this one begins abruptly, with a sharp, surprising colloquial exclamation "Busy old fool, unruly Sun..." The poet expresses his contempt for the sun by addressing it as "saucy pedantic wretch". The reason for this is that the poet, in his joy at his complete possession of his mistress, feels that he possesses, rules, and controls the whole world, and therefore is superior to the sun itself.

The poet treats the sun familiarly, colloquially, and irreverently. It is one of the paradoxes of the poem that the poet uses the adjective "unruly" for the sun when the sun is really the standard of order, regulation, and law. But order and rule in the sphere of Nature threaten the pleasure of love. So the poet rails against the sun. Love transcends time, and so the poet-lover feels a scorn for the sun which is an index of passing time.

In the second stanza the poet continues his boastful tone. The thought of his present good fortune makes him feel greater than the world-dominating sun. While expressing this feeling he also manages to pay exquisite compliments to his mistress. The mistress sums up in herself all the riches and perfumes of the East and the West. She is the glory of the whole world. Also, the setting of the scene, only implied in the first stanza, is now made more specific.

In the final stanza, the poet not only exalts his mistress but himself: "She's all states, and all princes I". In other words, she is the whole world and he the supreme ruler of the world. Here is an extravagant conceit, indeed. His tone in speaking to the sun now softens and becomes playful instead of harsh. Let the sun warm the lovers and it will truly be warming the whole world because the lovers are a microcosm of the world.

Says a great critic. "What distinguishes Donne's love-poetry is not merely its seriousness but its single-mindedness. 'Nothing else is'. Everything except their love for one another is shadowy and unsubstantial: everything else exists for him only in so far as it can be related to this, can be made to illustrate this, to throw light upon this. He does not use this experience as a mere starting-point, as a means for investigating and interpreting other experiences: all other experiences, all other universes of discourse, all his ingenious analogies, all his so-called metaphysics, are valuable to him only in so far as they help him to feel and comprehend more clearly and more intensely the essential this-ness of this experience".

Conceits in this poem. 1. The poet claims that, with a wink of his eyes, he can eclipse and cloud the sun.

2. The beloved who lies in the bed with him is a combination of both the Indies: of spice and mine. She thus represents both the East and the West Indies because of her sweet fragrance and her glitter. As for himself he represents all the kings of the world.

3. The beloved is all the kingdoms of the world, and the poet is all the monarchs of the world.

4. If the sun shines on the lover's bed-room only, and does not travel to other places, it will still be warming the whole world because their bed-room is a microcosm of the whole world.

These are all far-fetched and fantastic ideas.

NOTES

Lines 5—10. The poet addresses the sun contemptuously as "saucy pedantic wretch". (*saucy*—insolent *pedantic*—inclined to make a show of one's learning or power or authority). The sun, says the poet, may be a source of fear to schoolboys who get late for school, or apprentices who get late for work, or court-huntsmen who get late in reporting to the king whom they have to accompany on a hunting expedition, or country ants who must get busy in collecting grains. But the sun cannot scare lovers because the lovers are not to be governed by the artificial divisions of time. The lovers are indifferent to the rising of the sun because they can go on making love even after the sun has arisen.

Line 13. Here is a striking conceit. The lover claims that he can eclipse and darken the sun merely with a wink. (The lover has only to close his eyes, and the sunlight exists no more for him).

Line 15. Another conceit. The beloved's eyes are so bright that their light can dazzle the sun. (Normally we are dazzled by the sun's brightness, but here the situation is reversed).

Looke, and tomorrow late......or lie here with mee (lines 16—18). The lover asks the sun to go and find out whether the East Indies and the West Indies are still situated at their original location or they have moved from there to lie with him in his bed. The idea is that the beloved who lies in the bed is a combination of both the East and the West Indies. The East Indies were known for their fragrant spices, and the West Indies for their diamond mines. The beloved is fragrant and sweet-smelling like the spices of the East Indies, and she has the lustre and glitter of the diamonds of the West Indies.

Line 21. A fantastic exaggeration.

Lines 23—24. The poet and his mistress symbolize the whole world and all its rulers. Those who claim to be the rulers of the world are in fact merely imitating the lovers. Likewise all honour in the world is a shadow of the true honour which belongs to these lovers. All the wealth in the world is, too, an imitation of the wealth which the lovers represent. In other words, these lovers are the true rulers of the world ; they are all the honour, and all the wealth of the world ; and they are the whole world too. Nothing else exists.

6. The Canonization

For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
My five gray haires, or ruin'd fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your minde with Arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honour, or his grace,
Or the Kings reall, or his stamped face
Contemplate ; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love ?
What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd ?
Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground ?

When did my colds a forward spring remove ?
When did the heats which my veines fill
Adde one man to the plaguie Bill ?
Soldiers finde warres, and Lawyers finde out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

Call us what you will, wee'are made such by love
Call her one, mee another flye,
We'are Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
And wee in us finde the 'Eagle and the Dove ;
The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
By us, we two being one, are it
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.
Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

Wee can dye by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombes or hearse
Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse ;
And if no peece of Chronicle wee prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes ;
As well a well wrought urne becomes
The greatest ashes, as halfe-acre tombes,
And by these hymnes, all shall approve
Us *Canoniz'd* for Love.

And thus invoke us ; You whom reverend love
Made one anothers hermitage ;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage ;
Who did the whole worlds soule extract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes,
So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize,
Countries, Townes, Courts : Beg from above
A patterne of your love !

Critical Appreciation. *The Canonization* is possibly a defiant celebration of Donne's rash marriage : "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love". He turns from the world, where people are concerned only with what is external to themselves—careers, the merchant and his ships, the farmer and his land, the soldier and his warfare, the lawyer and his litigation ; all this will go on as before, business will be as usual, leaving him to his renunciation of the world. As for him, his fortune is ruined, but he and his beloved are all the world to each other : "we in us find the Eagle and the Dove", and they are "one another's hermitage". The great world will pass them by ; at their end, no costly funeral, no expensive tomb, no elaborate epitaph, no place in history. Truth is not embodied in mere size, however :

We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms.

They have renounced the world, and, thus qualified, will be canonized. Suppliants will ask them to "beg from above a pattern" of their love. This poem is itself their memorial, distinguishing the world, which emphasizes possessions, from true religion, which is concerned with being. The lovers, who know what they are, are contrasted with those who know only what they have.

A critic says : "The poem is an instance of the doctrine which it asserts ; it is both the assertion and the realization of the assertion. The poet has actually before our eyes built within the song the "pretty room" with which he says the lovers can be content. The poem itself is the well-wrought urn which can hold the lovers' ashes and which will not suffer in comparison with the prince's 'half-acre tomb'."

The tone of this poem is much the same as that of *The Good-Morrow* and *The Sun Rising*. As in those poems, the mood here is one of perfect contentment. The poem celebrates a unique love. It is a love which has been fulfilled. There is not the least touch of cynicism or bitterness here. Though the speaker is somewhat irritated by his friend's remonstrance, the mood of the poem is one of exaltation. In *The Sun Rising* the poet says :

> She's all states, and all princes I
> Nothing else is.

Here the poet, with equal elation, says that he and his beloved are "one another's hermitage" and that to them, love is "peace" not "rage". The poem is, indeed, a glorification of love, and it has an uplifting, ennobling effect on the reader. Here, as in the two poems mentioned above, "Donne writes of the mutual love of a man and a woman not as one pleasure among other pleasures, or as one experience among other experiences, or as an experience that intensifies other experiences, or as a starting point for voyages into unknown modes of being, but as of **something complete and sufficient in and for itself.**

The colloquial style of this poem is noteworthy. The opening of the poem is abrupt, dramatic, and intriguing :

> For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love.

The conversational tone is maintained throughout the poem.

Conceits in this poem. (1) The poet assumes that a lover's sighs have the power to drown ships, that his tears may flood the grounds, that his "colds" may bring about the season of winter, and that his "heats" may add to the list of deaths by plague. (These are all fantastic hyperboles. The poet is, of course, mocking at these Petrarchan exaggerations.)

(2) The beloved is one fly, the lover another fly. And they are tapers too. In them are to be found the Eagle and the Dove. They provide a clue to the riddle of the phoenix because they are "one," representing both sexes. These are all "fantastic" conceits.

(3) The lovers will be canonized.

(4) The lovers can contract the whole world because in each other's eyes they see the whole world reflected.

NOTES

Stanza I. *For Godsake, etc.* The opening of the poem is noteworthy. It is, abrupt, dramatic, and unconventional. The poet tells a friend (or, an acquaintance) to mind his own business and to let him love in peace.

Or chide my palsie......let me love, The poet suggests various ways in which his friend might occupy himself. If the friend must talk, let him scold the poet for suffering from palsy or gout, or for his growing baldness, or for his having ruined his prospects in life. Let the poet's friend add to his wealth by his efforts ; or let him improve his mind by some intellectual pursuit like the study of art. Let him take a course or obtain an important position (place). Let him cultivate a lord ("his Honour") or a bishop ("his Grace"). Let him attend upon the king or let him amass money ("his stamped face"—the coins with the king's face stamped on them). Let him do anything but let him not interfere with the poet's loving his beloved.

Stanza II. *When did my colds......remove* ? If I felt cold, my cold never prevented the advent of an early spring.

When did the heats......plaguie bill ? If I felt the heat of passion in my veins, that heat never caused others to fall ill. I was never responsible for adding to the weekly list of deaths from plague.

Stanza III. *Call her one......owne cost die*. We are the moths which destroy themselves in the flame of the candle, but we are at the same time the candle which burns and consumes itself. The reference here may be to sexual intercourse which drains all the lovers' enegry. It is in this sense that the lovers die at their own cost.

The Eagle and the Dove. The eagle is a symbol of strength, and the dove is a symbol of gentleness. By their union they combine both masculine and feminine qualities.

The Phoenix riddle etc. The phoenix was a mythical bird, the only one of its kind. It combined both sexes in itself. It burnt itself to death every 500 years, and rose anew from its own ashes. Donne means that he and his beloved are one and that they thus combine both sexes in that one entity. Furthermore they are continually revived after being consumed in the fire of their passion. Their love has lent them a mystery similar to the mystery of the phoenix. (Our claim to canonization for love is based on the unique quality of our passion which is unaffected by sexual indulgence, as by worldly ruin).

Prove mysterious. Show ourselves to be beyond the common run of human conduct and beyond the grasp of reason, as saints are.

Stanza IV. *Wee can dye......by love*. If we cannot live by love alone, we can at least die by it.

And if unfit......for verse. After death we may not be entitled to the erection of tombs and monuments to our memory. Our love-story will at least become the subject of poetry.

And if no peece......pretty roomes. We may not be mentioned in books of history, but we shall be celebrated in the stanzas of love songs. Sonnets will be written to describe our love and those sonnets will serve as "pretty rooms" for us.

As well a well-wrought......for Love. An artistic urn is as good for holding the ashes of a distinguished man, as a tomb erected over half an acre of land. In our case, songs celebrating our love will be written and those songs will establish a new religion (the religion of love). We two shall be honoured by being made the saints of that religion. (*canonized*—raised to the position of saints).

Stanza V. *Reverend love.* Love which deserves reverence.

Made one anothers hermitage. The poet was a hermitage for his beloved, and she was a hermitage for him. In other words, each lived in the other (and thus they were one).

You, to ....rage. Only the poet and his beloved were true lovers because they loved each other serenely. Now love is no longer serene ; it has become a tumult of the mind.

Who did the whole worlds soule......Courts. Another hyperbole. The whole world—countries, towns, and courts—was contracted by their love and could be seen reflected in their eyes. Their eyes became a mirror in which the whole world could be seen in miniature. Their eyes were also spies because they could watch the whole world which was reflected in them. (*epitomize*—represent in miniature ; compress in a small space).

Beg from above......your love. Their love will be regarded as the pattern of perfect love, and other lovers will pray to them to be inspired to love in the same way.

7. Song

Sweetest love, I do not goe,
  For wearinesse of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
  A fitter Love for mee ;
    But since that I
Must dye at last, 'tis best,
To use my selfe in iest
  Thus by fain'd deaths to dye.

Yesternight the Sunne went hence,
  And yet is here to day,
He hath no desire nor sense,
  Nor halfe so short a way :
    Then feare not mee,
But beleeve that I shall make
Speedier journeyes, since I take
  More wings and spurres than hee.

O how feeble is mans power,
  That if good fortune fall,
Cannot adde another houre,
  Nor a lost houre recall
    But come bad chance,
And wee joyne to it our strength,
And wee teach it art and length,
  It selfe o'r us to'advance.

When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not winde,
  But sigh'st my soule away,
When thou weep'st, unkindly kinde,
  My lifes blood doth decay
    It cannot bee
    That thou lov'st mee, as thou say'st,
If in thine my life thou waste,
  Thou art the best of mee.

Let not thy divining heart
  Forethinke me any ill,
Destiny may take thy part,
  And may thy feares fulfill ;
    But thinke that wee
Are but turn'd aside to sleepe ;
They who one another keepe
  Alive, ne'r parted bee.

Critical Appreciation. This is one of the best-known poems of Donne. It is an exquisite love-lyric. It is believed to have been addressed by Donne to his wife when he was leaving England for the Continent in 1611. It is thus a poem of autobiographical interest.

This poem shows Donne's tender love for his wife. She is the best of him, he says. When she sighs, she sighs his soul away. When she weeps, his life's blood doth decay. There is intense and genuine passion in such lines.

The poet gives very ingenious arguments to console his wife. He is leaving her not because he wants to. But death will part them in the end. His absence from her will therefore be a rehearsal of death. By means of such rehearsals he will make sure of her getting used to the idea of his ultimate death. His absence, he goes on to say, will be a brief one. The sun returns to the earth everyday. The poet's journey will be speedier than that of the sun because he will be prompted to expedite his return by his desire to meet his beloved. He asks her not to imagine that any misfortune will befall him. Their separation will be like a night's sleep for both of them. Those who love truly are never parted. The last two lines are, indeed, worthy of being memorized :

They who one another keep
Alive, never parted be.

The poet admirably describes the tendency of human beings to lengthen and stretch their unhappiness. When a misfortune be-falls us, we feel dejected and depressed as if our misfortune were not going to end :

> But come bad chance,
> And we join to it our strength,
> And we teach it art and length,
> Itself o'er us to advance.

This poem is remarkable for its optimistic note. There is neither any regret, nor bitterness, nor cynicism in it. The poet expresses perfect faith in his beloved. He has no suspicion that she will falter in her love Nor does he have any doubt about the durability of his own love How different is this poem from the song ("Go and catch a falling star"), or *The Legacy* or *The Will*, or *The Message* ! It has much in common with poems like *The Good-Morrow*, *The Sun Rising*, and *The Canonization*.

It is also one of the easiest of Donne's poems, without any touch of obscurity, without any intellectual complexity, and without any fantastic ideas.

Conceits in this poem. 1. The lover's partings from the beloved are regarded as rehearsals of his death (which will be the final parting).

2. When the beloved sighs, she sighs away the lover's soul. When she weeps, his life's blood does decay.

3. In wasting her own life away, she is wasting his life away, because she is the best of him.

4. This separation is like two lovers turning aside in their bed in order to fall asleep.

NOTES

For wearinesse of thee (line 2). because I am tired of you ; because I am fed up with you.

But since that I......deaths to dye (lines 5—8). I am leaving you because I must die at last and because the best course for me is to part from you sometimes, thus preparing you for my ultimate separation from you. Every parting from you is like an imitation death. When I leave you, my absence will, in your eyes, be like my death, though it will not be a real death but a rehearsal of death (*in jest*—as a joke ; not seriously ; not in earnest, *fain'd deaths*—pretended deaths ; counterfeit deaths ; imitation deaths. Separation from the beloved is regarded as a mock-death, because a separation is a temporary affair and because even during this brief period the beloved will miss him terribly).

Yesternight the sunne......so short a way (lines 9—12). Yesterday the sun left this world in the evening, but today it is back. In the same way I shall leave you now but return soon. I shall, in fact, return sooner and more surely even than the sun returns, because (*a*) I shall be prompted by a desire for you while the sun returns in a mechanical way, as a matter of routine without having any desire for any body, (*b*) I have my senses and my heart to urge me to come back for you, while the sun is without any senses and without a heart, and (*c*) I have a short distance to travel while the sun's journey is a very long one.

Then feare not mee......than hee (lines 13—16). You need not therefore have any apprehension about me. You should trust me to undertake a quicker journey because I have very strong reasons to go more speedily and come back more speedily than the sun. My desire to meet you and be with you will lend me spurs and wings and I shall therefore complete my journey in the shortest possible time.

O how feeble is mans power......recall (lines 17—20). Alas ! man's power is extremely limited. In a state of prosperity, man cannot lengthen or stretch time ; nor can he call back a single hour of good fortune.

But come bad chance......to advance (lines 21—24). But if we are overtaken by misfortune, we lend it strength and we tend to lengthen and prolong it. We add to our unhappiness by making it seem longer than it really is (*art*—skill, to afflict us ; *to advance*—to overtake us).

When thou sigh'st......doth decay (lines 25—28). Your sighs are not just a breathing out of air, but a breathing out of my soul. When you weep, you shed not just tears, but my blood. You are no doubt kind to me because you love me and you do not want me to leave you ; but you are kind in an unkind way because, by breathing out my soul and shedding my blood, you do much damage to me.

It cannot bee......best of mee (lines 29—32). You say that you love me. But that is not true. If you loved me, you would not waste away your life by sighing and weeping. Wasting your life away means wasting my life away, because your body and soul are, in reality, the best portions of my own individuality.

divining heart—heart that can guess or anticipate coming events (*to divine*—to guess ; to know beforehand). *Forethink*—think in advance ; anticipate.

Let not thy divining heart......fulfill (lines 33—36). Do not indulge in guess-work. Do not try to read into the future. Do not anticipate any misfortune for me. If you entertain any fears about me, fate may take your side and, in order to prove your fears to be true, may actually do some harm to me.

But thinke that wee......ne'er parted bee (lines 37-38). You should imagine that we are sleeping in the same bed and that we have just turned to opposite sides in order to sleep. (Just as lovers go to sleep and, on waking up in the morning, find themselves together in the same bed, so my absence from you will be a very short one and I shall soon be with you again).

They who one another......parted bee (lines 39-40). If two persons depend, for their very existence, on each other, there cannot be any parting between them. Any physical separation between two true lovers does not matter to them because the thought of each other will console both of them and because they will feel certain of meeting again.

8. Aire and Angels

Twice or thrice had I lov'd thee,
Before I knew thy face or name ;
So in a voice, so in a shapelesse flame,
Angells affect us oft, and worship'd bee ;
  Still when, to where thou wert, I came,
Some lovely glorious nothing I did see.
  But since my soule, whose child love is,
Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
  More subtile than the parent is,
Love must not be, but take a body too,
  And therefore what thou wert, and who,
    I bid Love aske, and now
That it assume thy body. I allow,
And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow.
Whilst thus to ballast love, I thought,
And so more steddily to have gone,
With wares which would sinke admiration,
I saw, I had loves pinnace overfraught,
  Ev'ry thy haire for love to worke upon
Is much too much, some fitter must be sought ;
  For, nor in nothing, nor in things
Extreme, and scatt'ring bright, can love inhere ;
  Then as an Angell, face, and wings
Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
  So thy love may be my loves spheare ;
    Just such disparitie
As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie,
  'Twixt womens love, and mens will ever bee.

Critical Appreciation. In *Air and Angels* the lover has sought for an ideal beauty and loved an ideal beauty in his imagination : "Twice or thrice had I lov'd thee,/Before I knew thy face or name.......'' But he discovers that her physical beauty is too dazzling for love to work upon and that same other abode for his love must be sought. And so he concludes, referring to the medieval doctrine that angels appeared to men in forms of mist or vapour :

Then as an Angel, face and wings
Of air, not pure as it, yet pure doth wear,
So thy love may be my love's sphere ;
  Just such disparity
As is twixt Air and Angel's purity,
'Twixt women's love, and men's will ever be.

It may be seem at first that the last two lines, with this emphasis on the superior "purity" of men's love to women's love, are not exactly complimentary to a mistress who has an angelic nature. But, when we think of it closely, it is in fact a version of an old Petrarchan compliment. What he is saying is this : if she will extend her love to him, if she will come down from her angelic status and be pleased to love a man, then his love for her may move like a planet within her love for him. But her love for him is less pure than his love for her, because of the direction of their two loves : hers *downward* for him, and his *upward* for a creature of angelic purity. Donne appears to be combining here the Platonizing love philosophy of the Renaissance with an older tradition, the tradition of the courtly lover inherited by Petrarch, according to which the lady is a superior being of angelic purity and beauty (as is the lady of Spenser's sonnets). Donne is here, surprisingly enough, following the old Petrarchan tradition in his involved and round-about manner.

Here is an appreciative comment on this poem : "It is, to say no more, superbly written. The clean precision and intermittent splendour of the diction ; the subtle modulations of its rhythms and phrasing, ripe for musical setting ; its controlled mastery of expression, so complete that the intricate stanza-pattern appears to reproduce the exact structure of the complex idea—there is a fineness, a pungent elegance about all this, that holds the imagination like good fugue* And as the sixteenth century understood the term, *Air and Angels* is superbly witty, all the more so because of its tone and its stylistic felicity".

Conceits in this poem. 1. The two or three women whom the poet had loved before meeting this woman were mere anticipations of her. His love for this woman is therefore the consummation of his previous love-affairs. (This means that if the poet has loved this woman before in other women, she must have existed as a kind of "bodiless Universal").

2. His love fixes itself in the different parts of her body—lip, eye, brow.

3. His love for her has been overwhelmed by her excessive beauty.

4. Just as angel is more pure than the air it takes to give substance to itself, so is a man's love more pure than a woman's love.

NOTES

Stanza I. *Twice or thrice had I......or name* (lines 1-2). It seems to be a puzzling line. But the poet means to say : "Before knowing you by face or by name, I had loved two or three women in whom I thought I found you. I believed that those women were an embodiment of your soul." (All his previous loves were merely an anticipation of this, his final love).

So in a voice, so in a shaplesse flame......and worship'd be

**fugue*—a fine musical composition·

(lines 3-4). When angels appear to human beings, they do not appear in a physical shape. Human beings become aware of angels by hearing the sound of a voice or seeing a formless, vague flame of fire. Angels manifest themselves through a voice or a flame ; and human beings, becoming conscious of them, begin to worship them.

Still when, to where thou wert......I did see (lines 5-6). But when I came to the spot where I hoped to find you, I only perceived something lovely and glorious but I did not see anything tangible or concrete. I did become aware of your presence, a lovely and glorious presence, but I could not *see* or *touch* you in a physical sense.

But since my soule......but take a body too (lines 7—10). A soul cannot act without a body. A soul must take "limbs of flesh" ; in other words, a soul must enter a body because otherwise it cannot perform its functions. Love is a child of the soul (that is, love takes its rise from the soul). As a child's subtlety cannot exceed the subtlety of the parent, love must also take a body before it can be effective. (The word "subtle" here means "vague", "not fully visible", "intangible", "insubstantial").

And therefore what thou wert......and brow (lines 11-14). For this reason I told my love to find out who you were and what your nature was, and the result is that my love has materialized in your person (*i.e* my love has assumed a shape which is no other than your body). My love has fixed itself in your features. (In other words, my love—the child of my soul—has fixed itself in the various parts of your body—your lips, your eyes, your brow. Your body is thus a kind of abode for my love).

Stanza II. *Ballast*—heavy material which is placed in a ship to ensure the ship's stability. A light vessel, when hit by a storm or the fury of waves may sink. So, if a ship is without sufficient cargo or merchandise, it is loaded with some heavy material in order that the ship may remain stable. (Here the poet's love is a ship, and the woman's beauty is the ballast).

wares—goods. *pinnace*—boat or vessel ; light ship. *over fraught*—over-loaded.

Whilst thus to ballast love......overfraught (lines 15—18). In order to keep the light ship of my love steady and stable, I loaded it with your beauty. But I have been almost submerged by the excess of beauty you have provided. I find that the ship of my love has been overloaded with your beauty. Love is overwhelmed in admiration (and not more satisfactorily lodged than before).

Every thy haire for love......can love inhere (lines 19—22). Your excessive beauty proved too much for my love to work on, because love cannot live either in nothing or in an excess of objects. Accordingly "some fitter must be sought." Since my love cannot reside in your features, it must reside in your love. My love can still find a body although it can use neither the "nothings" I have previously loved, nor the too great beauty of your form (which represents the consummation of my old loves).

Then ***as an Angell......be my love's spheare*** (lines 23—25). An angel is pure. The air which an angel takes to give substance to its face and wings is also pure, though not as pure as the angel itself.* Neither my love for those shadows ("nothings") nor my admiration of your extreme physical beauty ("scattering bright") is in keeping with the dignity of love. The only proper vehicle for my love is, therefore, your love : "So thy love may be my love's sphere". (The poet means that an unreturned love is no love and so he demands that his beloved should love him in return).

Just such ***disparitie......and men's ever will bee*** (lines 26—28). An angel is a little more pure and insubstantial than air. Just so much difference exists between a man's and a woman's love—that is, a man's love is finer than a woman's to that extent.

Note. The poet first makes a distinction between the purity of angels and the purity of the air which they take to give substance to their faces, wings, etc. This distinction is one of degree, and is very thin : both (the angels and the air) are pure, though the air is less pure than the angels which assume the air.

The distinction is then regarded by the poet as a key to the distinction between his (man's) love and her (woman's) love. Man's love is more pure, though only *slightly* more pure, than woman's love.

This last point may further be elucidated. The poet's love came first, and it compelled the woman's love by the poet's ardour. He loved her without any prompting, as a consequence of an inner urge. But she loves only in return for his love. This idea is implied in the parallel of angels and the air : Angels wear the air, take it up, and mould it to their purpose, whereas the air is just passive, waiting to be used, though perfectly responsive to the user. Here, in this mere passivity or initial neutrality, lies a woman's inferiority in love. The distinction between the purity of air and of angels is very similar to that between the love of a woman who will love only *in return* for love, though well enough then, and the love of a man who conceives love for the woman and works to compel an answering love*. Both man and woman have their worth but man who is the *more* active person, working spontaneously, is the pure devotee of love.

9. The Anniversarie

All Kings, and all their favorites,
All glory' of honors, beauties, wits,
The Sun it selfe, which makes times, as they passe,

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*One commentator (James Reeves). however interprets the idea here differently. According to him, the poet means that air is a little more pure and insubstantial than angels. But this is just the opposite of what the poet really means.

*We are here reminded of Donne's poem *Love's Deity* in which we are told that the function of Cupid is "indulgently to fit Actives to Passives".

Is elder by a yeare, now, than it was
When thou and I first one another saw :
All other things, to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay ;
This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keepes his first, last, everlasting day.

Two graves must hide thine and my corse,
If one might, death were no divorce.
Alas, as well as other Princes, wee,
(Who Prince enough in one another bee,)
Must leave at last in death, these eyes, and eares,
Oft fed with true oathes, and with sweet salt teares ;
But soules where nothing dwells but love
(All other thoughts being inmates) then shall prove
This, or a love increased there above,
When bodies to their graves, soules from their graves remove.

And then wee shall be throughly blest,
But wee no more. than all the rest.
Here upon earth, we'are Kings, and none but wee
Can be such Kings, nor of such subjects bee ;
Who is so safe as wee ? where none can doe
Treason to us, except one of us two.
True and false feares let us refraine,
Let us love nobly,'and live and adde againe
Yeares and yeares unto yeares, till we attaine
To write threescore : this is the second of our reigne.

Critical Appreciation. *The Anniversary* is one of the best -known poems of Donne. (It should, however, be distinguished from the two *Anniversaries* which were written by Donne to lament the death of Elizabeth Drury). This is a poem of happy, contented love. A note of rapturous happiness pervades the poem. There is not the least touch of bitterness or cynicism here. There is no suspicion of inconstancy or fickleness, no apprehension of the transitoriness of love, and no fear of any kind. The poet has the fullest confidence in the stability of his love for his mistress and is absolutely certain of her continued devotion to him. The poem is characterised by an intensity of passion. Nor is the passion diluted in any way by the argumentative quality which is found in so many of Donne's love-poems. The argumentative quality is not absent here, but the argument is quite simple. The style of the poem is simple, too, without the least touch of obscurity.

It is a year since the poet and his beloved first fell in love with each other. Everything except their love is a year nearer to final destruction. Their love is immortal, not subject to decline or death. When they die, their bodies will be buried in separate graves. Their souls, in which their love has a permanent residence, will leave their bodies, and they will then enjoy perfect happiness. But their happiness in heaven will be no greater than the happiness of others. It is here on earth, while they are still alive physically, that their true greatness can be appreciated. Here on earth they are each other's kings ; no other king had ever such subjects as they are to each other. No other king was ever so safe from treason as these two. They need have no fears, real or imaginary, but should live to enjoy a long and happy life.

Although a distinction has been made in this poem between the body and the soul, no such distinction is made between physical and spiritual love. Here Donne's conception of love seems to embrace both the physical and the spiritual aspects. Their love certainly lives in their souls, as he says, but the bodies are taken fully into account. It is here on earth that their real greatness as lovers appears, and earthly existence doubtless includes full use of the body to enjoy the pleasure of love whose real dwelling is the soul. The poem opens with what has been called "Donne's most splendid affirmation of the immortality of true love" :

> All other things to their destruction draw,
> Only our love hath no decay.

The plurality of the word "times"* (in line 3) sums up the transitoriness of worldly glories, and emphasises by contrast the eternity of true love. But then in the second stanza the poet remembers that in fact they must part, in some measure :

> Two graves must hide thine and my corse,
> If one might, death were no divorce.

We feel the strong clinging to the physical ; but of course it is a consolation to remember that the souls will be united in heaven. And yet another thought comes upon the speaker as he remembers that in heaven they will lose the unique, distinctive nature of their love because there everyone will be thoroughly blessed—"But now no more than all the rest". His mind turns back to earth where their monarchy is unequalled. In the last four lines of the poem the poet tacitly concedes that this perfect love is not immortal, but is subject to the rule of times. They will celebrate the beginning of the second year of their reign which will last until they are threescore. He speaks of refraining from "true and false fears". The false fear is the fear that they will ever be untrue to one another, but the true fear is that their mortal love is indeed subject to mortality.

Conceits in the poem. 1. All other things move towards their death and destruction, but the love of the poet and his beloved knows no decay because it is immortal.

2. Their love dwells in their souls. All other thoughts which are found in their souls are only temporary lodgers or visitors there.

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*In some editions this word is wrongly printed as "time" (in the singular). It should be "times" as is proved by the pronoun "they" which follows.

3. Here upon earth the two lovers are kings. Each is a king for the other, and each is a subject ruled by the other. As kings they are perfectly safe from treason.

NOTES

All kings and their favorites......first one another saw (lines 1—5). All kings, and all their favourites, all those who have won honours, or those who possess beauty or wit—all of them are older by a year now than they were when you and I first met each other. Even the sun, which is a criterion by which we judge the passing of time is now older by one year. (The poet is celebrating the first anniversary of his falling in love with the woman to whom he addresses this poem. Their love for each other, he says, is one year old. This means that the whole world, nay, the whole universe, is one year older than it was when they fell in love. The manner in which Donne conveys the passage of time is characteristic of him).

All glory of honors, beauties, wits (line 2). All those people who have won glory because of their honourable deeds, or because of their famed beauty, or because of their celebrated wit.

The sun it selfe, which makes times, as they passe (line 3). It is the rising and the setting of the sun by which we measure time. Sunset means that a day has ended, and sunrise means that another day has begun. Not only that ; as the sun rises higher and higher we are aware of the passing of time, hour by hour, minute by minute. Thus the sun is regarded here as the maker of times. The sun indicates the passage of hours, days, months, and so on. (The word is "times", not the singular "time", because the pronoun "they" is used immediately afterwards).

All other things......everlasting day (lines 6—10). All other things grow older and older and older, and in this way they move nearer and nearer and nearer to their death. However our love is not subject either to decline or to death. Our love is immortal and eternal. It has therefore neither a tomorrow nor a yesterday. These divisions of time—today, tomorrow, or yesterday—apply to mortal things. Our love remains fresh, and it remains uniform in its intensity. All days are alike so far as our love is concerned—the first day, and the last day ; the day of our love is an everlasting day. (There is, of course, no last day for our love, though there will be a last day of our physical existence on this earth. So far as our love is concerned, it is everlasting.

Two graves......no divorce (lines 11-12). When I die, I shall be buried in a grave. Similarly when you die, you will be buried in a grave too. There will thus be two graves for our two bodies. This means that our bodies will separate after death. If both of us could be buried in one single grave, death would not be able to separate us.

Alas ! as well as other princes......and with sweet salt teares (lines 13—16). We are princes, but like all other princes we must die in the physical sense. Our status is not lower than that of princes. You are my prince, and I am yours, because you rule me and I rule you, and because I am your subject and you are my subject. When we die (in the physical sense), we must bid good-bye to our eyes, ears, and other organs. Here on earth we feed each other's ears with oaths of loyalty, oaths which are genuine. Similarly, here on earth we feed our eyes with sweet salt tears. (The tears are "sweet" because they spring from the joy of fulfilment, and they are "salt" because, in the literal sense, the taste of tears is always saltish). The word "feed" is used because true pledges of constancy in love are a source of great pleasure for lovers and, in the same way, tears which result from the joy of fulfilment are a welcome sight to the lovers. (Or, these may be tears of grief at an impending separation between the lovers).

But soules where......from their graves remove (lines 17—20). But our love resides in our souls, not in our bodies. Our souls are the true abode of our love. All other thoughts which come into our souls stay there temporarily and then quit. Other thoughts are only visitors to our souls. But love has its permanent dwelling in our souls. When we die in the physical sense, our bodies will be removed to our graves, and then our souls will be liberated from our bodies. At that time it will become evident that our love dwells in our souls. After our death, our love may even increase because we shall be in heaven, and in heaven noble sentiments like love gain in intensity.

All other thoughts being inmates (line 18). The word "inmates" here is used, not in the sense of permanent residents, but temporary lodgers or visitors. The idea is, as already indicated above, that all other thoughts and feelings visit the soul temporarily and that only love resides there permanently. Only love is native to the soul, other thoughts and feelings being extraneous or incidental.

Then shall prove this. At our death, it will be proved that our souls dwell in our bodies, because our love will continue even when the bodies have been buried.

Or a love increased there above. Our love will become more intense there in heaven. The word "above" is used for heaven.

And then wee shall be throughly blest (line 21). And then, being in heaven, we shall be completely and absolutely happy. The word "throughly" is here used to mean "thoroughly".

But wee no more than all the rest (line 22). But, being in heaven, our souls will be no happier than the souls of other human beings. All souls, which are admitted into heaven, share the same supreme happiness. We shall, therefore, be just as happy as all others.

Here upon earth we're kings......one of us two (lines 23—26). On this earth we are more fortunate than when we shall be in heaven. In heaven we shall be no happier than others (line 22). But here on earth we are kings, and nobody else can equal us. We are greater kings than all other kings. You are my king and I am your king. As for subjects, you are my subject and I am your subject. No other king can equal us in greatness and glory, nor can any other king have such subjects as you and I have. Besides, we enjoy perfect safety which other kings do not enjoy. Other kings may be dethroned by traitors. But nobody can be a traitor to us, except one of us two. Only you can become a traitor to be, and only I can become a traitor to you ; but this will never happen. Thus we are perfectly safe against treachery.

True and false feares......the second of our reigne (lines 27—30). Let us not entertain any fears, true or false, real or imaginary. Let us love each other in a dignified, lofty manner, and let us live, year after year, till we have loved for sixty years. So far we have loved only for one year, and we have now entered the second year of our love. As monarchs of each other, we have begun the second year of our reign.

10. Twicknam Garden

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with teares,
   Hither I come to seeke the spring,
   And at mine eyes, and at mine eares,
Receive such balmes, as else cure every thing ;
   But O, selfe traytor, I do bring
The spider love, which transubstantiates all,
   And can convert Manna to gall,
And that this place may thoroughly be thought
   True Paradise, I have the serpent brought.

'Twere wholsomer for mee, that winter did
   Benight the glory of this place,
   And that a grave frost did forbid
These trees to laugh, and mocke mee to my face ;
   But that I may not this disgrace
Indure, nor leave this garden, Love let mee
   Some senslesse peece of this place bee :
Make me a mandrake, so I may groane here,
   Or a stone fountaine weeping out my yeare.

Hither with christall vyals, lovers come,
   And take my teares, which are loves wine,
   And try your mistresse Teares at home,
For all are false, that tast not just like mine ;
   Alas, hearts do not in eyes shine,
Nor can you more judge womans thoughts by teares,
   Than by her shadow, what she weares.
O perverse sexe, where none is true but shee,
   Who's therefore true, because her truth kills mee.

Critical Appreciation. Here is a love-poem which is deeply pessimistic and extremely bitter. The speaker, who is the poet himself, gives expression to his disappointment in love, his frustration, and his profound grief. The poem is a lament. (The title of the poem may be spelt as *Twicknam Garden* or as *Twickenham Garden*).

The poem has a personal, autobiographical character. It seems to centre round Lucy Countess of Bedford who lived at Twickenham Park from 1608 to 1617, and for whom the poet probably conceived a hopeless passion. The poet's distress finds an effective and touching expression in the very opening line where he speaks of being "blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears". All the beauty of a garden in spring fails to soothe his heart because he has gone there with his heart full of love, which is like a spider and "can convert manna to gall", and jealously which is like the "serpent" of Paradise. (*Stanza I*)

The poet feels that the trees seem to be mocking his grief. Winter would have suited his mood better (because the English winter is very severe and presents a scene of desolation). He would like to be metamorphosed into some senseless object like a "mandrake" (a plant which has some human properties) or "a stone fountain weeping" throughout the year. (*Stanza II*)

The poet then asks lovers to come and take a specimen of his tears by the taste of which they can judge and test the sincerity of their mistresses' tears : "For all are false, that taste not just like mine". A woman's tears are no index of her thoughts ; her tears are deceptive and misleading. The female sex is "perverse" and all women, with the sole exception of the poet's beloved, are false. (*Stanza III*)

The cynical note of the poem is obvious in its attack upon women in general. The disparaging reference to the fair sex distinguishes this poem from those poems, like *The Good-Morrow, The Sun Rising* and *The Canonization,* in which Donne celebrates women's constancy and in which he describes the contentment and joy of love which has been fulfilled. The cynical attitude to women in this poem links it with the Song : "Go and catch a falling star" in which the poet tells us that "Nowhere lives a woman true and fair". The poet's mood in this poem, as already indicated, is one of "dejection and emptiness and unrelatedness".

Conceits in this poem. 1. The poet's love is a spider which converts manna to gall, and his jealousy is the serpent makes this garden an equivalent of Paradise (where Eve was tempted to taste the forbidden fruit by Satan in the guise of a serpent).

2. The poet would like to be changed into a mandrake ("so I may groan here") or into a stone fountain ("weeping out my year").

3. The poet's tears are the wine of love. Lovers are asked to taste the poet's tears and then to taste their mistresses' tears. If the taste is not the same it means that their mistresses' tears are false. (The poet claims his own tears to be true and genuine and therefore a criterion by which other tears should be judged.)

NOTES

Blasted with sighs. The poet refers to his sighs as a powerful gust of wind which strikes him. (*blasted*—struck ; hit ; battered).

And surrounded with tears. The poet is shedding such profuse tears that he is almost surrounded by them.

Hither I come to seeke the spring (line 2). I have come to this garden in order to observe the beauty of spring.

And at mine eyes......as else cure every thing (lines 3—4). There is such loveliness in the garden for my eyes to see, and such sweet sounds for my ears to hear, as would cure me of any other ailment or malady (but not the disease of love). (*balms*—someting sweet and comforting).

But O, selfe traytor......to gall (lines 5-7). But I am a traitor to myself. I am my own enemy. I have made it impossible for myself to draw any comfort and consolation from the beauty of the spring in this garden. I have brought with me my passion of love which is poisonous like a spider and which changes everything into something unpleasant and odious. This love is so poisonous that it can convert even heavenly sweetness into something extremely bitter. (*transubstantiates*—transforms ; gives an altogether different shape to. *Manna*—heavenly food ; nectar ; something very pleasant and sweet. *gall*—bitterness ; unpleasantness).

And that this place......the serpent brought (lines 8-9). I have not only brought with me my passion of love, but I have also brought with me my feeling of jealousy which may be compared to a serpent because of its fatal sting. This garden may be compared to the Garden of Eden (Paradise) because of its beauty and charm. This garden is, indeed, true Paradise because it has a serpent also in the form of my jealousy. (The reference here is to the serpent through whose body Satan tempted Eve to taste the forbidden fruit in Paradise).

'Twere wholsomer for mee,......and mocke mee to my face (lines 10—13). The trees with their green leaves and beautiful blossoms seem to be laughing in the joy of spring and they seem to be mocking at my misery in my very presence. It would be much better for me if winter were suddenly to descend upon this garden in order to darken its glory and if a heavy frost were to settle upon the trees thus putting an end to their laughter. The desolation of winter would better suit my mood of sorrow.

But that I may not......of this place bee (lines 14—16). The sudden descent of winter on the garden would, however, be a disgrace which I would not like to face. At the same time, I do not wish to give up loving even though love has brought me to such a sorry pass. I, therefore, appeal to you, O god of love, to change me into some lifeless object in this garden. (The meaning of the phrase "this disgrace" is not quite clear. It is possible that the poet is here referring to some indignity to which his beloved may have subjected him. He is unable to endure the pain of that indignity, and yet he cannot leave loving that woman. He would therefore like to be changed into a lifeless object).

Make me mandrake......my yeare (lines 17-18). Let the god of love change me into a mandrake (which is half-human and half-plant). As a mandrake I can continue to groan in my distress. (Mandrakes were supposed to cry out in agony when uprooted). Or, let me be changed into a stone-fountain. The water gushing out from that fountain will actually be the constant tears that I shall be shedding. (*mandrake*—the name of a plant which has a thick, fleshy root and large, oblong leaves. It was formerly used as a narcotic ; the classical writers knew of it, and Shakespeare speaks of it as "the insane root that takes the reason prisoner. The forking of the root often produces a resemblance to the human figure. On being uprooted the plant produces a screaming sound. That is why Donne here says that, if changed into a mandrake, he will groan in the garden: In the Song : "Go and catch a falling star", Donne speaks of the superstitious belief that the mandrake could become pregnant with a child (because of the resemblance of the plant with a human figure, as mentioned above).

Hither with christall vyals......that tast not just like mine (lines 19—22). Let all lovers come here with crystal bottles which they can fill with my tears. My tears may be regarded as the wine of love. Let these lovers then take my tears home and compare the taste of their mistresses' tears with the taste of my tears. If the taste of their mistresses' tears is not the same as that of mine, it means that their mistresses' tears are false. Only my tears are genuine, the result of authentic love. All other tears should be judged by the criterion of the taste of my tears.

Alas ! hearts do not......what she weares (line 23—25). It is a pity that the sincerity of a woman cannot be judged by the expression in her eyes. There may be an expression of true love in a woman's eyes and yet there may be either no love or false love in her heart. Nor can the real thoughts of a woman be judged by her tears. A woman may weep and weep, and yet her tears may be crocodile tears, a mere hypocrisy, something to deceive men. Just as we cannot, by looking at the shadow of a woman, judge what kind of clothes she is wearing, so we cannot judge her real thoughts by her tears.

O perverse sexe......kills mee (lines 26-27). Women are unreasonable and irrational. They are "perverse", that is, they know no logic. All women, with the exception of my beloved, are false in their love. I know that my beloved is true because it is her truth that is killing me. (The idea is that, if she had not been true, the poet would not have loved her so much, and if he had not loved her so much, he would not have been so frustrated and bitter. He is dying of his frustration only because his beloved is true. But we may well ask to *whom* she is true. If she is true to someone else, and does not care for the poet at all, why should he seek her? But our asking such questions would be foolish when we realise that love knows no logic).

11. Loves Growth

I scarce beleeve my love to be so pure
  As I had thought it was,
  Because it doth endure
Vicissitude, and season, as the grasse ;
Me thinkes I lyed all winter, when I swore,
My love was infinite, if spring make'it more.
But if this medicine, love, which cures all sorrow
With more, not onely bee no quintessence,
But mixt of all stuffes, paining soule, or sense,
And of the Sunne his working vigour borrow,
Love's not so pure, and abstract, as they use
To say, which have no Mistresse but their Muse,
But as all else, being elemented too,
Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do.

And yet not greater, but more eminent,
  Love by the spring is growne ;
  As, in the firmament,
Starres by the Sunne are not inlarg'd, but showne.
Gentle love deeds, as blossomes on a bough,
From loves awaken'd root do bud out now.
If, as in water stir'd more circles bee
Produc'd by one, love such additions take,
Those like to many spheares, but one heaven make,
For, they are all concentrique unto thee.
And though each spring doe adde to love new heate,
As princes doe in times of action get
New taxes, and remit them not in peace,
No winter shall abate the springs encrease.

Critical Appreciation. *Love's Growth* opens with Donne's characteristic brooding over the problem of change ("vicissitude", "season"). With such an opening we might expect that the lover is about to lament the fact that his love has decayed ; but, on the contrary, what worries him, what proves the instability of his love, is the fact that it seems to be increasing :

> Methinks I lied all winter, when I swore
> My love was infinite, if spring make it more.

What, then, is the nature of love ? he asks. "But if this medicine, love, which cures all sorrow......sometimes do" (lines 7—14). Having decided that the nature of love involves the total physical and spiritual being of man, Donne seems to drop the problem entirely in the second half of the poem, shifts his attitude completely, and feels that in fact the problem of vicissitude and season does not exist for this particular love of his : lines 15—18. The scientific sound of the image ("Stars by the sun are not enlarg'd, but shown") has a satisfying effect, until we try to find out exactly what it means. "Eminent" is of course used in the sense of "prominent". But from here on the best commentators disagree. One interpretation of the line is : "The stars at sunrise are not really made larger, but they are made to seem larger". Another interpretation (according to which "by the sun" means "near the sun) : "Love has risen higher in the heavens by spring, and shines the more brilliantly as do stars when near to the sun". The latter meaning seems to be more convincing as Donne is not talking about sunrise but about the rising of the spring. But we need not be too particular about the meaning of this line ; we are simply to gain its positive effect of security in love, as the remaining images (lines 19—28), continue to assure us with their varied action.

However, the last word "increase" in this passage (19—28) would seem to contradict the beginning of this same passage. If there has been an increase then love must have grown greater and love must not then be so pure as he had thought it was. And indeed, if we look closely at the last passage we see that it does not basically deal with the assurance stated in the first four lines of that passage, but rather carries from the last line of the first passage : "Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do". It soon appears that the speaker is talking about "love-deeds" and that it is love in action that he wishes to see developing : these are the additions that love will take, like circles stirred in water, or like spheres about one centre. New heat is not a quality of a pure substance, in the scientific sense that Donne is broaching in the poem's first line. Love-deeds, the buds of spring, circles in the water, the new heat of the season—all these are part of a transient and fluctuating physical universe. And indeed the surprising image, "As princes do in times of action get/New taxes, and remit them not in peace", brings us vividly into the realistic world. Thus the assertion at the end, "No winter shall abate the spring's increase", stands as a defiance against all the imagery of vicissitude that dominates the poem. We may believe this assertion, or we may believe the whole poem (preferably the latter).

This is a somewhat abstract poem the ideas of which do not produce an immediate impact on us. We do not respond to the ideas quickly. In fact we have to strain ourselves to get at the poet's meaning.

The poem is written in a serious, philosophical (or, metaphysical) mood. There is no mockery, no satire, no irony here. The essence of the poem seems to lie in the last line : "No winter shall abate the spring's increase". In other words, love is capable of growing, (or becoming "more eminent") but it cannot diminish. Here we find Donne lending a certain dignity, or even sublimity, to love.

Conceits in this poem. 1. Love, if it is subject to vicissitude and season, cannot be absolutely pure. If love can increase or grow, it cannot have been pure or infinite previously. (This is somewhat of a paradox. Why can pure love not increase ?)

2. Love is a medicine which cures all sorrow with more sorrow (*i.e.*, it drives out other sorrows by replacing them with its own sorrow).

NOTES

I scarce beleeve my love......as the grasse (lines 1—4). I can hardly believe that my love is as pure as I used to think it was. My love is subject to ups and downs, and to change, like the grass which is sometimes fresh and green and sometimes withered and dry. Love that is subject to change cannot be absolutely pure.

Me thinkes I lyed all winter......if spring make it more (lines 5-6). I think that during the whole of the winter I lied when I declared on oath that my love was infinite. With the coming of spring, my love has increased. If my love had been infinite, it could not have increased. There can be no addition to what is already infinite.

But if this medicine......sometimes do (lines 7—14). Love may be regarded as a kind of medicine which cures all sorrow by creating in the lover's heart another kind of sorrow. Love gives rise to a pain in the heart, but there is a virtue in that pain. That pain has the capacity to cure the lover of all other anxieties and griefs. (The idea is that the lover is so absorbed in his love that he forgets all his cares and anxieties. He concentrates only on his passion of love). Love is not a pure essence. It is a mixture of many stuffs. It causes a pain in the soul, in the heart, and in the body. Love can derive a greater vitality from the sun, and can thus become more energetic. It is not so pure and abstract as it is said to be by poets who have no mistress except the Muse of poetry. The Muse being their only source of inspiration, they do not know the exact nature of love. One must have an actual experience of love in order to know what it is. Like everything else, love is composed of many elements. Love is sometimes contemplative or passive, as in winter ; and sometimes active and growing, as in spring.

And yet not greater......but showne (lines 15—18). And yet the spring has not made my love any the *greater* in quantity or intensity ; it has made my love only *more prominent* and brighter just as the sun's light serves to reveal the stars (or planets) but does not increase their size.

Gentle love deeds......do bud out now (lines 19-20). Like blossoms which make their appearance on the branch of a tree in spring, gentle deeds of love emerge or arise from love's root stimulated by spring.

If, as in winter......concentrique unto thee (lines 21—24). If we cast a stone into water, a circular wave is seen, and this is quickly followed by several more circular waves, all these waves being concentric. The centre of all these waves is the point where the stone fell into the water. In the same way, love takes many additions, like circles stirred in water, or like spheres about one centre. In my case you, my beloved, are the centre around whom the additional circles or spheres of my love revolve.

And though each spring......the spring's encrease (lines 25—28). And, although each spring will give an additional warmth to my love for you, no winter can diminish the intensity of love which has gained in strength during the spring, just as kings collect additional taxes from the people in times of war but do not cease to recover those taxes during times of peace.

The argument of the poem may thus be stated : My love is subject to change, like the grass. It is therefore not as pure as I thought it to be. My love has grown during spring. Love is composed of all kinds of stuffs and is not so pure and abstract as poets believe, who have no mistress but the Muse, their imaginary source of inspiration. Love is sometimes contemplative and passive, as in winter ; sometimes active and energetic, as in spring.

However, in spring love does not become greater ; it only becomes more prominent, just as the planets are revealed, not enlarged, by the sunlight. In spring love becomes active, and gentle deeds flow from it. Each spring adds to love what no winter can take away, as rulers collect additional taxes in times of war but do not withdraw them in times of peace.

Note. Lines 15—28 contain several similes :

1. Love is made more prominent and more bright by the spring, just as stars are revealed by the sunlight.

2. Love deeds flow from love's root during spring, just as blossoms make their appearance on trees during that season.

3. Additions to love have as their centre only the beloved, just as there are so many spheres but only one heaven.

4. Just as princes collect additional taxes in times of war but do not withdraw those taxes in times of peace, in the same way springs adds new warmth to love, but this warmth does not diminish in winter.

12. The Dreame

Deare love, for nothing lesse than thee
Would I have broke this happy dreame,
  It was a theame
For reason, much too strong for phantasie,
Therefore thou wakd'st me wisely ; yet
My Dreame thou brok'st not, but continued'st it,
Thou art so true, that thoughts of thee suffice,

To make dreames truth ; and fables histories ;
Enter these armes, for since thou thoughtst it best,
Not to dreame all my dreame, let's do the rest.

As lightning, or a Tapers light,
Thine eyes, and not thy noise wak'd mee ;
Yet I thought thee
(For thou lov'st truth) an Angell, at first sight,
But when I saw thou saw'st my heart,
And knew'st my thoughts, beyond an Angels art,
When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st when
Excesse of joy would wake me, and cam'st then,
I doe confesse, it could not chuse but bee
Prophane, to thinke thee any thing but thee
Coming and staying show'd thee, thee,
But rising makes me doubt, that now,
Thou art not thou.

That love is weake, where feare's as strong as hee ;
'Tis not all spirit, pure, and brave,
If mixture is of *Feare, Shame, Honor*, have.
Perchance as torches which must ready bee,
Men light and put out, so thou deal'st with mee,
Thou cam'st to kindle, goest to come ; Then I
Will dreame that hope againe, but else would die.

Critical Appreciation. This is a poem containing several hyperboles and conceits. The poet has been dreaming of his beloved when she enters his bedroom and interrupts the dream. The interruption of the dream should have depressed the poet but for the fact that the very subject of the dream has appeared on the scene. For this reason she has been wise in waking up the poet : her entry will serve to continue the dream. Then comes a hyperbole which is also a conceit. She is so true that thoughts of her can suffice to convert a dream into a fact, and a myth into reality :

> Thou art so true, that thoughts of thee suffice,
> To make dreams truths, and fables histories.

The poet then invites the woman to come into his embrace so that what he wanted to do in his dream may now be done in actual fact.

We have some more hyperboles in the second stanza. It was the radiance of the woman's eyes that woke up the poet just as a flash of lightning or the light of a taper might have woke him up. The poet at first thought her to be an angel, but no angel could have seen into his heart and read his thoughts as she has done :

> But when I saw thou sawest my heart,
> And knew'st my thoughts, beyond an angel's art,...

It would have been profane for him to have thought her to be anybody but herself.

In the final stanza the poet, on seeing that the woman has risen to go away, says that her love for him is weak because she is afraid to stay with him and let him make love to her. Her love is not pure and brave if there is in it a mixture of fear, or a sense of shame, or moral scruple. If a woman loves whole-heartedly, she does not think of what others will say and she is not prevented by a sense of honour to make love to the man whom she claims to love. Perhaps she came to kindle his desire and is now going away, to come back and satisfy his desire just as torches are lighted and then put out to be kept in readiness for use when necessary. If his reading is correct, he will wait hopefully for her ; otherwise he will die.

The Dream is a serious love-poem, in spite of the element of exaggeration in it. A note of sincerity runs through it. The poet convinces us that he is really and deeply in love with the woman he is addressing. We also agree with him when he says that a woman who loves truly has no reason to feel afraid of social criticism or to be deterred by a sense of honour. "Fear", "shame", and "honour" become irrelevant when a woman has genuinely given away her heart to a man.

The poem is written, of course, in the colloquial style which is a characteristic of most of Donne's love-lyrics.

The following comment on this poem is noteworthy : "In a sense this is a very abstract and intellectual poem, and yet the effect of it is anything but abstract in the pejorative* sense. It is an absolutely consecutive and continuous piece of argument from the first line to the last, and each simile, whether phenomenal (lightning, taper, torches) or intellectual (angels, simple and compound substances) is almost inseparable from the thought it illustrates and expresses. The pictorial element, if present at all, is at a minimum : what is described is not a sight but such thoughts and feelings as the sight might be supposed to have suggested. The diction is precise and almost scientific, and the words are completely uncharged with associations not strictly relevant. There is as much of drama, imagination, feeling, sensation, experience as of intellect and logic, and this sensational or experimental element is conveyed, not by a choice of words rich in association, but by speech-rhythm, inflexion, cadence. Every line, in fact, is intensely alive."

Conceits in this poem. 1. The beloved is regarded as so true that the very thought of her can convert a dream into a fact, and a myth into reality.

2. The radiance of the beloved's eyes is like a flash of lightning or the flame of a candle, and it was this radiance, not her noise, which woke the poet up :

> As lightning, or a taper's light,
> Thine eyes, and not thy noise wak'd me.

**pejorative*—uncomplimentary ; depreciatory ; disparaging.

3. The beloved, at first sight, seems to the poet to be an angel. This illusion was produced because of the fact that she loves truth as an angel does.

4. The beloved's leaving the poet is interpreted by the poet with reference to torches which men light in order to test their efficacy and which are then put out to be lighted again when need be. The beloved came in order to kindle the poet's sexual desire. She is now going but she will return soon in order to satisfy that desire.

All these are far-fetched, hyperbolic notions and therefore may be regarded as being conceits.

NOTES

Stanza I. *Deare love......this happy dreame* (lines 1-2). I was dreaming happily of you, my beloved. Now that you have come, my dream has been interrupted. If somebody else had broken my happy dream, I would have been furious or grief-stricken. But since you have replaced my dream, I do not complain.

It was a theame......wisely (lines 3—5). The dream I was seeing deserved to be corrected by reason because it was too fanciful. You have therefore done well in waking me up and interrupting that dream. (The poet means that his dream was so divorced from reality that it was necessary to terminate it. The pleasure that he was enjoying in his dream could never have been enjoyed by him in actual fact).

My dreame thou brok'st not...and fables histories (lines 6—8). And yet I cannot say that you terminated my dream. In fact, by coming here you are continuing my dream. I was seeing you in my dream, and now I am seeing you actually. You are therefore a continuation of my dream. Besides, you are the very embodiment of truth. You are so true that the very thought of you is enough to change dreams into actualities, and myths into realities. (*fables*—myths ; imaginary stories. *histories*—true records of events. The very thought of the beloved is enough to make imaginary events look as actual events).

Enter these armes......let's do the rest (lines 9-10). Come into my embrace. You thought it best that I should not see my dream till the end. If you had not come, I would have embraced you and made love to you in my dream. Now that the dream has been interrupted, you should let me actually embrace you and make love to you. What we would have done in the remaining part of my dream should now be done by us in actual fact.

Stanza II. *As lightning......wak'd mee* (lines 11-12). I was awakened not by the sound of your entering my bed-room, but by the bright light in your eyes just as I might have been awakened by a flash of lightning or by the bright light of a candle brought by someone into my bed-room. In other words, it was your radiance hat awakened me.

Yet I thought thee......at first sight (lines 13—14). Yet at first sight I did not recognise you as my beloved. I thought you were an angel. After all, you have an angelic love of truth. Because of your love for truth, I mistook you for an angel.

But when I saw......any thing but thee (lines 15—20). But then I found that you were able to look into my heart and guess my thoughts. I knew it was you because no angel could have penetrated my heart. I saw that you had guessed what I had been dreaming about. You also judged when I would wake up because of the excess of joy which I would experience in my dream. And you entered my bed-room at the very moment when I would otherwise also have woke up because of the excess of joy in my dream. When I found all this, I must admit that to think that you were an angel or anybody else but you would have been impious on my part. (It would have been an act of impiety for me to think that you could be anybody except yourself. Only you could have judged what I had been dreaming ; only you could have come at the appropriate moment, the moment of an excess of joy in my dream).

Stanza III. *Coming and staying show'd thee, thee* (line 21). The fact that you came and stayed on proved that it was you, and nobody else. (In other words, your identity was established by the fact that you came here and stayed here).

But rising makes me doubt......not thou (lines 22-23). But, now that you have got up to go away, I doubt whether it is really you. If my visitor had really been you, you would not have thought of leaving me and going away.

That love is weake, where feare's as strong as hee (line 24). If a person's love is accompanied by any kind of fear, then that person's love is weak no matter how strongly or intensely that love may be felt. In other words, if love is strong enough, the lover or the beloved will feel no fear.

'Tis not all spirit......Honour, have (lines 25-26). Love is not a pure and strong spirit if there is in it a mixture of fear, or a sense of shame, or a scruple about honour. The greatest love is that which defies fear, the sense of shame, and the thoughts of honour. The greatest love over-rides all such considerations.

Perchance as torches which must ready bee......but else would die (lines 27—30). Sometimes it so happens that people have to keep torches ready for some particular purpose. So they light the torches in order to test whether they are serviceable, and then, having assured themselves, they extinguish the torches. They now know that, when the need arises, these torches can be lit to serve the purpose. Perhaps you, my beloved, are dealing with me in the same way. You came to kindle or to arouse me and, having assured yourself that I am in a fit condition, you are going away in order to return (to make use of me or to make love to me). Now that you are going, I will keep dreaming of this hope (namely, that you will return). Without that hope, or without dreaming about that hope, I would die.

13. A Valediction : of Weeping

Let me powre forth
My tears before thy face, whil'st I stay here,
For thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare,
And by this Mintage they are something worth,
For thus they bee
Pregnant of thee ;
Fruits of much griefe they are, emblemes of more,
When a teare falls, that thou falls which it bore,
So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore.

On a round ball

A workeman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, *All*,
So doth each teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

O more than Moone,

Draw not up seas to drowne me in thy spheare,
Weepe me not dead, in thine armes, but forbeare
To teach the sea, what it may doe too soone ;
Let not the winde
Example finde,
To doe me more harme, than it purposeth ;
Since thou and I sigh one anothers breath,
Who e'r sighes most, is cruellest, and hasts the others death.

Critical Appreciation. In *A Valediction* : *Of Weeping*, Donne imagines a relationship which is much more elaborate and metaphysical than anything in the gentler *Valediction* : *Forbidding Mourning*. Its theme is the parting of a woman from a man, at which the man weeps and knows the reason for his weeping. His tears, as they fall before her face, are called coins : they bear her stamp because they can reflect her image (like a mirror), and because she has called them forth, made them, signed them, and hence given them value : he is weeping because of her, and that is why his tears are the "fruits of much grief". They are also "emblems of more" because : "When a tear falls that thou fall'st which it bore". His tear, signed by her image, falls to the ground : her reflection in it falls also. But the words "thou fall'st" also mean that she falls from grace, or is unfaithful : as her image falls, so she will ; and the thought of this is cause and signal for him to weep afresh : "So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore". Just as his tear falls, and her image with it, into nothing, so her love, as soon as they separate, is nothing too. The whole verse, with its tear-imagery, is undeniably sad, and at first reading unaccountably so. But when we see the underlying point of her unfaithfulness (nowhere is the word used or the accusation made directly), the culminating tear-images and the slow-moving gentle sorrow of the verse gain in power and significance.

In the second stanza, the tear is compared to a globe which is blank (nothing) until the cartographer has painted on it a copy of the world : then it is "all". So his tears with her image (a copy of her) reflected in them change from meaningless drops into worlds

> Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow
> This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

She is his heaven : her tears are rain which, mingling with the world of his own tears, dissolves that world. This stanza is highly ingenious and very difficult : the poet's tears stand for the world, made out of nothings (empty globes of water) by her image ; while her tears, achieving only the ironically-meant physical comparison to a flood, promptly drown that world when she, too, weeps. This leads us directly to the impassioned apostrophe of the woman in the final stanza :

> O more than Moon,
> Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere,

in which he begs her not to weep, for her tears are destructive. All through the poem, this point has been built up, and fresh proof is now offered of the sinister meaning of the line already quoted : "When a tear falls, that thou fall'st which it bore". Her tears are destructive because they are false. They can do him no good and therefore she had much better not weep at all, but leave the weeping to him. In final reproach, the poet adds that she should not sigh either because, when he goes overseas, waves and wind may kill him anyhow. Her destructive sighs and tears can only add to his distress. He forbids her to express emotions which he believes to be as false and destructive as the waves and the wind.

The ingenuity of this poem is extraordinary. The argument that Donne gives here may be stated thus : "I am sad because I am leaving you to go abroad. I weep because I fear that separation will end our love. You are weeping now more copiously than I, but your tears are merely physical and destructive of love. My tears, however, are real (that is, intellectual) things ; they are worlds containing all of you. Do not, therefore, weep because, by doing so, you destroy my valuable tears with your valueless ones which kill me because they only show that you do not really care. Your tears are like rain, or the sea, and your sighs are like the wind. Do not anticipate now what the real wind and the sea may do to me when I go abroad."

The subject of this poem is the intellectual significance and point of the man's feelings as they struggle to express themselves against the natural, spontaneous, but wholly empty protestations of the woman as expressed by her physical sighs and tears. Both the poet and the woman appear to react identically to the situation, But the psychological difference is made clear by the poet's use of a single symbol-object, namely a tear.

The poem is remarkable for its rhythmic subtlety, and much of its effect depends upon the tension between the formal, stanza pattern and the emotion which struggles within it. That the poem is brilliantly ingenious is evident ; but its true force lies in its unity, in the ordering of incantation, dramatic urgency, wit, fantasy, passion and reality within its chosen form.

The poem is over-intellectal and the imagery hyperbolical, but this kind of expression is characteristic of Donne's continual attempts to put into words a feeling which over-flows expression.

Conceits in this poem. 1. The lover's tears are coins because they bear the beloved's reflection or image.

2. The beloved's image makes the lover's tears "pregnant"—gives them life and meaning.

3. When a tear falls from his eyes, she falls too (because the tear contained her image).

4. Each of his tears is a whole world because each tear contains her reflection.

5. His tears combined with her tears will be like a deluge or flood which can ovewhelm and destroy the world and dissolve the lover's heaven or happiness.

6. Her tears can drown him.

7. Her tears and her sighs can teach the sea and the wind to prove fatal to him when he goes on his voyage.

8. As they are sighing each other's breath, each can, by sighing too much, hasten the other's death.

NOTES

Stanza I. *Let me powre forth......stay here*. Allow me to give way to my tears while I am still in your presence.

For thy face......they are something worth. Each tear that I shed bears your reflection or your image, and this it is that gives my tears their value, like a coin which has its value because of the king's head stamped on it.

For thus they bee/pregnant of thee. Your image or reflection makes my tears pregnant—that is, gives them life and meaning.

Fruits of much griefe they are. My tears are the result of much grief (caused by the impending separation).

Emblemes of more. These tears symbolize the greater grief which our parting will give rise to.

When a teare falls, that thou falls which it bore. When a tear falls from my eyes, your image which was seen in it falls also.

So thou and I......diverse shores. We together make up a world. When we are on different shores (that is, away from each other), we are reduced to nothing. (We have no value if we separate).

Note. The stanza has moved from the uninhibited passionate opening, through the ingenuity of the conceits, to the bleak bareness of the last line.

Stanza II. *On a round ball......which was nothing, All.* A globe by itself is nothing. But a skilled workman, by working on it, convert it into a map of the whole world showing all the continents —Europe, Africa, Asia, etc. The globe then represents the entire world and becomes all-important.

So doth each teare......by that impression grow. In the same way each of my tears in which can be seen your reflection becomes the whole world, or the globe. (A tear is also round or spherical like the globe on which a map of the world has been drawn). Each of my tears bearing your image becomes an emblem of our love, which is the world we live in.

Till thy tears mixt with mine......my heaven dissolved so. Your tears (because you are weeping too) mixed with mine become a flood which overwhelms and destroys the whole world (that is, our world), and destroys my heaven (that is, the happiness which our love affords to me).

By waters sent from thee. Your profuse tears. (We are now to imagine that the beloved too is shedding tears).

Stanza III. *O more than Moone.* O my beloved, who are more powerful than the moon, you can draw up the tides of weeping both from me and yourself.

Draw not up seas to drowne me in thy spheare. Do not drown me either with my tears or your own tears, because I am still fairly happy, being in your sphere (that is, in your arms).

Weepe me not dead, in thine armes. Do not drown me with your tears (when I am still in your arms).

But forbeare/To teach the sea, what it may doe too soone. You should refrain from shedding tears because seeing your flood of tears the ocean too may feel encouraged to use its flood (or waves) to drown me. (If you remain calm, the sea too will remain calm, and my life will not be endangered during my voyage).

Let not the winde......purposeth. You should refrain from sighing also because, if you keep sighing, the wind will feel encouraged to blow harder and harder and so may do me more harm than it otherwise might do. Hearing your sighs, the wind may grow into a storm on the sea and may drown me.

Since thou and I sigh......hasts the other's death. When I sigh, I breathe out not only my own breath but yours too. Similarly when you sigh, you breathe out not only your own breath but mine also. Thus, by sighing, we merely sigh away each other's life. Whoever sighs the most, is the most cruel and hastens the other's death. (Therefore we must both control our grief, and accept this separation in a stoical mood).

14. Loves Alchymie

Some that have deeper digg'd loves Myne than I
Say, where his centrique happinesse doth lie :
I have lov'd, and got, and told,
But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,
I should not finde that hidden mysterie ;
Oh, 'tis imposture all :
And as no chymique yet th'Elixar got,
But glorifies his pregnant pot,
If by the way to him befall
Some odoriferous thing, or med'cinall,
So, lovers dreame a rich and long delight,
But get a winter-seeming summers night.

Our ease, our thrift, our honor, and our day,
Shall we for this vaine Bubles shadow pay ?
Ends love in this, that my man,
Can be as happy'as I can ; If he can
Endure the short scorne of a Bridegroomes play ?
That loving wretch that sweares,
'Tis not the bodies marry, but the mindes,
Which he in her Angelique findes,
Would sweare as justly, that he heares,

In that dayes rude hoarse minstralsey, the spheares.
Hope not for minde in women ; at their best
Sweetnesse and wit, they'are but *Mummy*, possest.

Critical Appreciation. *Love's Alchemy* is a frankly cynical poem. Donne here regards love as a mystery to which he, for one, cannot find a clue. Those who claim to understand this mystery are impostors. They may be compared to those medieval chemists who, while seeking the unattainable elixir, might discover some pleasant by-product and might boast of this discovery as something marvellous. Lovers dream of lasting bliss while, in reality, they get only a short-lived happiness.

Continuing his disparagement of love, the poet says that we should not sacrifice our ease, wealth, honour, and youth for the sake of love's transient pleasure. He refers to marriage as a humiliating ceremony, a farce. The man who says that he has married not a woman's body but her angelic mind is making an absurd claim. It is like saying that the crude music of a wedding ceremony is sweet like the music of the spheres. A woman has no mind at all. After marriage, even the sweetest and most intelligent woman appears no better than a dead body. In other words, the husband will find her to be totally lacking in intellect. Her intelligence was only superficial.

Thus the poet scoffs at love, at marriage, and at the whole female sex. The tone of the poem is satirical, and the satire is sharp, pungent, and merciless. The last two lines are among the cruellest that Donne ever wrote :

> Hope not for mind in women ; at their best
> Sweetness and wit, they are but Mummy, possess'd.

The following comment on this poem is illuminating : "*Love's Alchemy* is more argumentative (than "Go and catch a falling star"), though not distinctively scholastic or metaphysical. Neither need it be regarded, as it often has been, as the record of a mood of deep disenchantment and disgust. It is written with great gusto, with great animal spirits, and with admirable use of speech-rhythm. It should not be regarded as evidence that Donne at one time seriously believed that women had no minds, but rather as a deliberately exaggerated, provocative, and paradoxical expression of what always remained his conviction, namely, that in love the physical and the spiritual were ultimately inseparable. In *Love's Alchemy* and in many similar poems Donne is being mainly witty and paradoxical, and insisting, partly in reaction against the Platonic and Petrarchan idealization which had degenerated into a mere fashion, on only one aspect of the truth, an aspect which he deliberately exaggerates and distorts and presents as though it were the whole truth. Donne is moved not so much by a desire to express what he believes to be the whole truth, or even the half-truth about love, as by a desire to shock, pillory, and expose those 'loving wretches' who swear in sugared sonnets that not the bodies marry but the minds."

NOTES

Stanza I. *Loves Myne* (line 1). Love is regarded as a mine into which one has to dig in order to get its essence.

His centrique happinesse (line 2). The happiness which lies at the centre of love ; the happiness which is the innermost core of love.

Some that have deeper......doth lie (lines 1—2). Some people tried to probe the mystery of love deeper than I. These people talk about the happiness which lies at the centre of love (*i e.* they talk about the happiness which results from an experience of love).

I have lov'd......that hidden mysterie (lines 3—5). I have had an experience of love, too. I have loved, I have got something out of my experience, and I have talked about my experience. But if I were to go on having experiences of love till my very old age, I would not be able to understand the mystery of love. For me love remains, and will always remain, a riddle.

Oh, 'tis imposture all (line 6). Those who claim to have understood the mystery of love are imposters or liars.

chymique (line 7). chemist. *Elixar* (line 7). elixir, a liquid which medieval chemists toiled hard to find in the course of their researches, and which could either turn base metals into gold or prolong life. (Of course there was no such substance).

pregnant pot (line 8). the chemist's crucible which is claimed as containing the elixir.

odoriferous (line 9). ·having a pleasant odour or smell.

And as no chymique......summer's night (lines 7—12). No chemist has been able to discover the elixir which can turn base metals into gold. And yet, if any chemist should, in the course of his researches, happen to find a substance that has a pleasant smell or some medicinal properties, he will claim that his crucible contains the precious stuff (the elixir or something akin to it). In the same way, lovers imagine that a rich and prolonged delight will result from their love. (Lovers imagine that their love will prove to be a source of a rich and durable happiness for them). But in actual fact these lovers will get only a short-lived happiness. (*winter-seeming*—that which *seems* as long as winter. *summer's night*—a night the duration of which is short. Lovers think that their happiness will be lasting but it turns out to be short-lived).

Stanza II. *Our ease, our thrift......shadow pay* ? (lines 13—14). Should we then sacrifice our comfort, our wealth, our honour, and our youth for the sake of this vain and short-lived illusion ? (Love is regarded as a shadow, as an illusion, as something unreal). *thrift*—hard-earned money ; money saved with great difficulty. *day*—the best part of life ; youth.

my man (line 16). my servant. (*man*—man-servant).

the short scorne of a Bridegrooms play (line 18). the brief humiliating ceremony which a bridegroom goes through ; the brief farce of a marriage ceremony.

Ends love in this......Bridegrooms play (lines 16—18). Does love, then, lead just to this that my servant can be as happy as I provided he can endure the brief farce of a marriage-ceremony. Love leads to marriage. But this illusory happiness of marriage is as much within my servant's reach as within my reach. There is nothing very remarkable about marriage. It is only a means to sexual pleasure ; any and every body can enjoy this pleasure.

loving wretch (line 19). wretched fellow who has fallen in love.

which he in her angelique findes (line 21). the woman's mind which to the wretched lover seems to have an angelic quality.

as justly (line 22). with the same justification (*i.e.*, without any justification, because his previous oath was as false as the one he is going to take now.

that dayes rude hoarse minstralsey (line 23). the crude, jarring music of the wedding-day.

the spheares (line 23). This is a reference to the old belief that the planets produced sweet musical sounds in the course of their motions.

That loving wretch......the spheares (lines 19-20). There are some wretched lovers who will swear that a marriage-ceremony unites not the bodies of the lovers but their minds. Such a lover finds in his beloved the pure mind of an angel. But, of course, he is completely mistaken. And he will swear, equally erroneously, that on his wedding-day the music of the organ or of the choir in the church was as sweet as the music of the spheres, even though in actual fact that music might have been crude and jarring.

Hope not for minde......possest (lines 24-25). We should not expect women to have minds. Even the sweetest and most intelligent of them, once we possess them, will be found to be no better than a mummy (*i.e.*, something lifeless and inanimate). Some women may, at a distance, appear to have minds but, when we marry them, we find them to be absolutely devoid of intellect. (*wit*—here, "intelligence". *Mummy*—dead body preserved by being embalmed).

15. A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day

'Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes,
Lucies, who scarce seaven houres herself unmaskes,
The Sunne is spent, and now his flasks
Send forth light squibs, no constant rayes ;
The worlds whole sap is sunke :
The general balme the'hydroptique earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the beds-feet, life is shrunke,
Dead and enterr'd ; yet all these seeme to laugh,
Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph.

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring :
For I am every dead thing,
In whom love wrought new Alchimie.
For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
From dull privations, and leane emptinesse ;
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darknesse, death ; things which are not.

All others, from all things, draw all that's good.
Life. soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have ;
I, by loves limbecke, am the grave
Of all, that's nothing. Oft a flood
Have wee two wept, and so
Drownd the whole world, us two ; oft did we grow
To be two Chaosses, when we did show
Care to ought else ; and often absences
Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses.

But I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown ;
Were I a man, that I were one,
I needs must know ; I should preferre,
If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means ; Yea plants, yea stones detest
And love ; All, all some properties invest ;
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow, 'a light, and body must be here.

But I am None ; nor will my Sunne renew.
You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne
At this time to the Goat is runne
To fetch new lust, and give it you,
Enjoy your summer all ;
Since shee enjoyes her long nights festivall,
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call
This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

Critical Appreciation. *A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day* is a soliloquy. The occasion is religious, for it is St. Lucy's Day and the word "nocturnal" carries the sense of "an evening service in a church". But as it is a private meditation there is also the meaning, familiar in the musical term "nocturne" of "a composition of a pensive, melancholy, holy character". The saint commemorated is St. Lucy (Lucia), virgin and martyr, said to have been put to death at Syracuse in the year 303. She was regarded as the patron saint of those afflicted in the eyes. Her Day is the 13th December, so fixed in the Julian calendar for the shortest day of the year, which might be regarded as the martyrdom of light. The conjunction of the night season and the longest night provided just that concentration of significance in a moment of time which could excite and agitate Donne's poetic nature.

The poem seems to refer to a beloved lady, recently dead. The lady was probably not his wife, as the poem expresses an altogether different reaction to the subject, "Nothing", from what we find when he became a preacher, and as his wife died two years after his ordination. The preacher's message stressed his deliverance from nothing and the impossibility of returning to nothing. The poem is an experience of nothing, and of surrender to it.

And yet the reference may be to his wife whose death was a real possibility, at a time of illness during these years of struggle and depression. In a mood of deep dejection, fearing such a loss, contemplating the consequences, he would realize what was only a fear of the mind. This is in harmony with what we know of his foreboding on going to Germany in 1619, and of his proleptic approach to his own death when he reconstructed its external form by means of a portrait, and enacted it before his own eyes. It is not necessary, however, to identify the lady of the poem, who may be the saint herself, whose death is now commemorated and who embodies his idea of woman, without whom life has no positive meaning.

The poem is controlled by this experience of darkness in its intensest form, at double strength, the darkest part of the day for the longest possible time. The structure is much simpler than that of many of his poems. The argument does not move forward and backward or suffer distraction from complicating side-issues. Instead, a very unusual thing in Donne, the last line reiterates the first, the argument is static and the purpose of the poem is to apply this double darkness to his own annihilation and show that it also is the intensest possible. The darkness is not ordinary darkness but, to use a musical term for this nocturne, darkness *fortissimo*. Likewise his deprivation through bereavement is not ordinary nothing. It is the very essence of nothing, that nothing which preceded the creation of the world.

The argument runs thus : **Stanza I** : "It is the darkest, and the longest night of winter, and nature sinks away on her death-bed ; yet it can laugh, knowing that life will be renewed. But I am really dead".

Stanza II. "Come, next season's lovers, read me who am an epitaph on all dead things. For you there is the prospect of renewal, but not for me. I have died through love, which has taken all human deprivation and made it me, and then proceeded to extract from it the very essence of Nothing. Yes, I have a resurrection. I am remade, more Nothing than before, through my bereavement. What I have suffered through love I thought was nothing ; but it has assumed a more intense form even than that. The worst is yet to be."

Stanza III. "The alchemist's quest for the quintessence is to achieve a greater good. But Love has made my nothing even more intense. In our Love for each other we became aware of Nothing. If the strains of life brought us to tears it was like the Flood over again, drowning the world. If anything drew us away from each other we went back farther, to the first chaos, each of us in a world of chaos. And if we parted, it was as though life itself had ceased".

Stanza IV. "I have been taken back—back to the Flood, back beyond the Flood to Chaos. back beyond Chaos to Death, back beyond Death to Nothing before Creation, for I am the very stuff of the first Nothing. I am not an ordinary nothing. A man. beasts, plants —mention what you will—have some qualities of soul, and even stones attract and repel. Nothing suggests something. A shadow suggests a substance, and light. There is something to be said, even about nothing."

Stanza V. "A shadow requires light, but I am before Light was created. The real Sun of my life has gone for ever, and I cannot be even a shadow. You who read this epitaph (that is, me), run along and enjoy yourselves. The sun is your accomplice. Now leave me, for I am ready to keep vigil, and spend this night in prayer."

The repetition of "enjoy" in line 42 is deliberate. He achieves enjoyment through her. The poem ends with a re-affirmation of its beginning, but it is more than a repetition, for through this meditation one who could not laugh (line 9) now rejoices as a Festival approaches.

This is a deeply religious poem. We particularly note the writer's spirit of meditation, his submission to, and acceptance of, the unalterable. He does not demand a miraculous alteration of life (or, rather, death), and he does not question and rebel. He is not far from saying in effect : "I resign myself to thee, O God". And the poem ends with a paradox : it becomes a religious celebration of Nothing, and is itself something, one of the great English poems. The argument running through the poem is highly metaphysical and abstract. It is one of Donne's most difficult poems.

NOTES

Line 1. The year and the day stand in the relation of "correspondence" like the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Line 3. *flasks*—may mean the stars.

Line 4. *light squibs*—weak flashes.

Line 6. *hydroptique*—the reference to dropsy suggests disease. The dying earth has drawn into itself the life-spirit of the world. The word is used to mean "extremely thirsty".

Line 7. *Whither, as to the beds-feet, life is shrunke*. Two meanings are possible : (*i*) The sap and balm have sunk from the dying world, as the preserving moisture of a dying man drains from him back towards the earth *via* the feet of the bed. (*ii*) The scope of life has shrunk to the briefest bound, as a dying man's concern contracts to the limit of his own bed.

Line 9. The religious allusion is to be noted, as also the statement that he *is*, not that he writes, the epitaph.

(The poet sums up in himself the general debility by calling himself "their Epitaph").

Line 11. *At the next world......the next spring*. For other lovers the coming spring will be a resurrection into a new life after the dead time of love, but not for the poet.

Line 13. *Alchimie* -Chemistry as practised in ancient and medieval times. It was believed that, in addition to the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, dwelling in them all and so unifying them in itself, was a fifth element, purer than any of the four—the quintessence. Extracted from the four elements, it could be used (1) to endow mankind with perpetual health, and in this sense was known as the elixir ; and (2) to endow base metals with perpetual health, *i.e.*, purge them of imperfection and turn them into gold ; in this sense it was known as the philosopher's stone". Donne's purpose here is to create surprise and to show that, though usually the alchemist sought to extract what was good, indeed perfect (line

19), in this case the alchemist Love has extracted from nothing an even more intense and perfect form of Nothing. He is not an example of creation out of nothing, but of the quintessence of Nothing extracted from it.

Line 14. *expresse*—distil by crushing out.

Lines 16-18. *From dull privations......things which are not.* Love has destroyed the poet completely by starting with the usual deprivations of a disappointed lover and ruining him further, so that he is now reborn into a wholly negative existence.

Line 19-20. *All others......beeing have.* The essential constituents of a person's being derive from, and are sustained by, the vitalizing elements present in all created nature.

Line 21. *limbecke*—alembic ; a chemical apparatus used for distilling.

Line 24. *Drownd......as two.* We ourselves were the world which our mutual grief drowned.

Line 25. *two Chaosses.* Chaos is a state in which everything goes its own way with no concern for its place in the whole scheme ; and their absorption in each other made them behave so in respect of the rest of the world.

Line 26. *absences.* separations, which parted their bodies but not their souls, so that the bodies were mere shells.

Line 29. *the first nothing*—As the alchemists strive to find the quintessence or first principle of life, so love has worked towards the essence of death, the first principle of nothing.

Lines 30-31. *that I were one......know.* It is a characteristic of man to know that he is a man ; and the poet, not knowing this, cannot then be a man.

Lines 31-33. *I should preferre......some means.* Beasts characteristically elect means and ends, and the poet's inability to do this proves him less than a beast.

Lines 33-34. *Yea plants yea stones......love,* Early naturalists interpreted all physical events in terms of attraction or repulsion, sympathy or antipathy. Since the poet now finds himself without motions of attraction or repulsion, he must be lower than vegetable and mineral nature.

Lines 35-36. *an ordinary nothing......shadow.* He is also less than insubstantial phenomena such as shadows, for something there must be to produce a shadow.

Line 38-40. *lovers, for whose sake......new lust.* The sun enters the constellation of Capricorn at the winter solstice, the agent of our life thus renewing itself at the source of sexual energy. The point here is that while the "lesser sun" will ultimately revive the world's life and the sexual vigour of lovers, for him there can be no renewal since his greater sun (the beloved) is now dead, but only a self-dedication to Night after St. Lucy's Day.

Line 39. *the Goat*—Capricorn.

Line 41. *all*—this word reduced the love of others to ordinariness, and is meant to be as undistinguished as saying "a good time was had by all". It is just the fulfilment of lustful appetite, to serve which the lesser sun (*i.e.*, the sun) has moved on.

Line 43. *prepare*—a religious act Donne had a due sense of the place of preparation in religion.

16. The Apparition

When by thy scorne, O murdresse, I am dead,
And that thou thinkst thee free
From all solicitation from mee,
Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,
And thee, fain'd vestall. in worse armes shall see ;
Then thy sicke taper will begin to winke,
And he, whose thou art then, being tyr'd before,
Will, if thou stirre, or pinch to wake him, thinke
Thou call'st for more,
And in false sleepe will from thee shrinke,
And then poore Aspen wretch, neglected thou
Bath'd in a cold quick silver sweat wilt lye
A veryer ghost than I ;
What I will say, I will not tell thee now,
Lest that preserve thee ; 'and since my love is spent,
I'had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.

Critical Appreciation : Autobiographical quality. *The Apparition* is essentially a dramatic poem. Because of its dramatic truth, the power and convincingness with which Donne creates the situation, this poem has often been regarded as autobiographical, as the record of an actual experience. If it is really autobiographical, it may have been provoked by, and addressed to, that married woman who appears in some of his Elegies. But more probably the woman in this poem has been suggested partly by Ovid's *Amores** and partly by Donne's dramatic imagination. It is not necessary to presuppose an actual experience as the basis of this and other poems by Donne (just as we should not presuppose an actual experience as the basis of Shakespeare's dramatic scenes). Donne had the imaginative and dramatic power to develop suggestions and situations which he probably found in *Amores*. (Here he develops with superb imaginative and dramatic power the situation suggested to him by such poems as those in which Horace and Propertius threaten their ungrateful beloveds with what will be their fate when their charms have fled).

Exaggerated wit, and dramatic quality. This poem shows, too, the element of exaggeration in Donne's wit though it might equally be regarded as an example of the dramatic quality of Donne's work. Exaggeration and dramatization—these two elements are often almost inseparable in Donne's poetry. Often when Donne is mainly concerned with exercising his wit, he will work out the implications of his attitude in a manner essentially dramatic. In the present poem the dramatic element predominates, but it is present in much of Donne's poetry, as also in much of George Herbert's, and in several poems by other 17th century poets who are generally regarded as belonging to the School of Donne (for instance, in Andrew Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress*).

**Amores*—the title of a collectien of love-poems by the Latin poet, Ovid. These poems are characterized by impudence, insolence, and a certain witty depravity. ("Amor" in Latin means "love").

Argumentative quality. *The Apparition* illustrates also the argumentative quality of Donne's poetry. From beginning to end, the poem is an argument logically developed. The argument runs something like this : The poet will die of his beloved's scorn. His ghost will visit her in her bed-room when she is in the arms of another lover. At the entry of his ghost, the candle in her bed-room will go out, and she will try to rouse her lover for help. The lover, already exhausted by his love-making, will pay no heed to her, and she will lie helplessly in a state of fear. What his ghost will say to her at that time, the poet does not wish to tell her now because, if he tells her, she will be able to preserve herself from harm. The poet loves her no longer ; so he would rather that she should sorrowfully repent of her cruel treatment of him than that, by knowing what threat his ghost will give her, she should preserve herself unharmed.

The last line. There is a lot of subtlety in the way the argument is developed, and the meaning in the last line is somewhat obscure :

> I'd rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
> *Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.*

How she will "rest still innocent" by his threatenings is not quite clear. Nor it is quite clear why the woman's lover should be feeling sexually exhausted (line 7 : "being tired before") when the woman wants more of sexual activity. (Perhaps she has greater appetite and stamina than he).

More intellectual than emotional. This poem is more intellectual than emotional. We evidently have here that emotional *intellectuality* which is a general characteristic of Donne's poetry. There is less of passion here than in many other poems of Donne.

Conceits in the poem. 1. The woman is a murderess who kills her lover with her scorn. (There is nothing unusual about this conceit).

2. After the lover is dead, his ghost will visit the woman in her bed-room when she is in the arms of another lover.

3. At the ghost's entry, the candle in the bed-room will flicker and go out. (This is a common superstition).

NOTES

Lines 1—5. *O murdresse*—The poet addresses his beloved as a murderess because she is totally unresponsive towards him, and because her cruel scorn will kill him. (It is one of the commonest conceits for a man to call his beloved a murderess).

all solicitation—all pleadings for her love ; all his entreaties to her to soften towards him.

fain'd vestall—a woman who pretends to be chaste and untouched ; a woman who claims falsely that her virginity is intact. (*feigned*—pretended ; counterfeited. *vestal*—virgin).

in worse armes—in the arms of a worse lover than myself ; in the embrace of somebody inferior to me. (The implication is that women have no discrimination. A woman may reject a lover who is true and worthy, and fall for a man who is worthless.

Note. The argument in lines 1—5 is as follows : "I shall die because of your cruel scorn. When you have thus killed me, you will think that you have got rid of me and my wooing of you. But then my ghost will visit you at night and will see you lying in the arms of a lover inferior to me. Your claim to virginity is after all a pretence. You rejected my love on the ground that you wanted to preserve your virginity, but that was only a pretext.

Lines 6—13. *sick taper*—candle burning faintly ; dim candle.

will begin to winke—will begin to flicker because of the approach of a ghost, and will then go out.

And he, whose thou art then. And the lover in whose arms you will then be lying.

being tyr'd before—your lover will by that time be feeling exhausted after having made love to you.

or pinch to wake him—you will pinch your lover to wake him up because you will be in a state of fear at the going out of the candle.

thinke/Thou call'st for more—but your lover will think that you are pinching him in order to rouse him to make love to you again.

And in false sleepe, will from thee shrinke. Thinking that your sexual appetite has not yet been satisfied he will pretend that he is fast asleep. Being already exhausted he will be in no condition to repeat his love-making. He will therefore remain cold towards you and not respond to your pinching.

poor, Aspen wretch—poor, trembling, miserable creature (*aspen*—pertaining to an asp, a tree the leaves of which keep quivering all the time). *neglected thou*—neglected or ignored by your lover.

Bathed in cold quicksilver sweat wilt lye. You will lie, drenched in cold mercury-like sweat. (*quicksilver*—mercury ; white like mercury).

A veryer ghost than I. You will be more truly a ghost than even I. (*verier*—more truly). I shall be a ghost no doubt ; but in your state of fear and wretchedness you will be more of a ghost than even I.

Note. The argument in lines 6—13 is as follows : "At the entry of my ghost into your bed-room, your candle will burn dimly and faintly and will then go out. You will feel frightened in the darkness. You will move restlessly and you will pinch your lover to wake him up in order that he may comfort you. But he will think that you want him to make love to you again because your passion is yet unsatisfied. Being tired of his previous sexual activity, he will pretend to be fast asleep and will avoid you. You will thus be ignored by him, and you will lie neglected, trembling, sweating on account of fear. And in that condition you will be more of a ghost than I.

Lines 14—17. *What I will say, I will not tell thee now,/lest that preserve thee.* I shall then tell you something that will fill you with the greatest terror. But I am not going to reveal to you now what I shall say then because, being forewarned, you will be able to protect yourself against that terror. Foreknowledge will diminish your dread of the event. (But this is not flawless logic. Foreknowledge of a calamity generally intensifies the fear of the calamity).

And since my love is spent,......rest still innocent—and since I love you no more, I want rather that you should suffer anguish and repent of your cruelty towards me than that, by knowing what I might threaten you with, you should preserve yourself unharmed.

Note. The argument in lines 14—17 : "I shall then say something horrible. But I am not going to tell you now what I shall then say. If you learn now what I shall then say, you will be able to defend yourself against the terror of my words. I love you no more. I therefore want that you should experience the pangs of repentance and feel sorry for the cruel way you treated me. If I tell you now what I shall threaten you with as a ghost, you will manage to preserve yourself unharmed ; but I prefer your repentance to this latter alternative. (The argument in the last two lines is somewhat involved and obscure).

17. A Valediction : forbidding mourning

As virtuous men passe mildly'away,
  And whisper to their soules, to goe,
Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
  The breath goes now, and some say, no :

So let us melt, and make no noise,
  No tearer-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
'Twere prophanation of our joyes
  To tell the layetie our love.

Moving of th'earth brings harmes and feares
  Men reckon what it did and meant,

But trepidation of the spheares,
Though greater farre, is innocent.
Dull sublunary lovers love
(Whose soule is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

But we by'a love, so much refin'd,
That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiffe twin compasses are two,
Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the'other doe.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth rome,
It leanes, and hearkens after it,
And growes erect, as it comes home.

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must
Like the'other foot, obliquely runne ;
Thy firmnes makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begunne.

Critical Appreciation. *A Valediction* : *Forbidding Mourning* is, like most of the poems in "Songs and Sonets", a love lyric, though it is far removed from the warbling simplicity of most Elizabethan words for music.

It is an astonishingly witty and, at the same time, movingly tender poem. According to Izaak Walton, it was addressed by Donne to his wife before he set out with Sir Robert Drury on a long visit to the Continent at the end of 1611. The poem has thus autobiographical value. There is no mockery in this love-poem, no touch of cynicism. Donne would not have called it an "evaporation", the disparaging epithet which he used for most of his early secular poetry.

The poet here bids his beloved farewell, but his tone here is gentler than, say, in *Elegy V* ("His Picture"), and there is no hint of mockery here. A four-line stanza, with the lines rhyming alternately, has been used with exceptional skill.

The imagery of the poem is noteworthy. First, there is an image of death, for parting is a kind of death. The virtuous man is calm ; he has the confidence of faith, no agonizing struggles ; he whispers to his soul, and so peaceful is his parting that his friends cannot tell the moment of death. Donne dramatizes this scene, in the speeches of the friends. (**Stanza I**).

As the virtuous man's soul parts from his body, so should the lovers part from each other. There must be no floods of tears, or tempests of sighing. The laity those who do not know what true love is—must not be made aware of what is happening, for this would profane the lovers' relationship. (**Stanza II**).

The next stanza illustrates what Dr. Johnson meant when he spoke of images being "yoked violently together". Earthquakes and the movements of the spheres are brought into the picture. Earthquakes are, like floods and tempests, disturbances in the natural order, and they were thought to be indications of God's wrath, which is why men inquire into their meaning, as well as calculate the damage done. The spheres, the sun, the planets, and the stars, are heavenly. These concentric spheres were first supposed to rotate on a single axis, an imaginary extension of the poles ; then, to account for the movements of the planets and the procession of the equinoxes, deviations from concentric motion, or "trepidations", were imagined. Such "trepidations" are, of course, immensely more powerful than any mere disturbance of the earth's surface, but since they are part of the heavenly order, they are "innocent". The poet's love, greater than that of ordinary mortals, is both celestial and innocent. The love which the poem celebrates is not dependent on the body ; it is not made of earthly "elements". So mysterious is its power that the lovers themselves "know not what it is" ; yet the mystery is secure ; the lovers are assured of it. (**Stanzas III, IV and V**).

Next come two stanzas in which two more "unpoetic" images are yoked to reinforce this conclusion, the first from the craft of the gold-beater, the second from the use of compasses, an instrument indispensable to the mathematician, the astronomer, the navigator, a symbol of the new learning, and one capable of constructing the perfect figure, the circle, emblem of eternity. Gold is the most precious of metals, and therefore fit to represent the poet's most precious love. Gold is also the most ductile, and therefore can be beaten thinner than any other metal. So though the lovers are separated in space, their love is unbroken, and never can be broken since it is, so to speak, infinitely ductile. (**Stanzas VI and VII**).

The simile of the compasses is then expanded. We speak of a *pair* of compasses ; yet the pair is *one* thing ; and so the two lovers are one (Stanza VII). The poet must travel ; his beloved must stay at home. She controls him, however distant he may be ; she is his centre, and is the cause of that perfection in his life which is symbolized by a circle. (**Stanzas VIII and IX**).

The conceits—the two similes—in this poem are very ingenious, very far-fetched, and fantastic. Such conceits form the substance of much metaphysical poetry, and the initiated reader would get much pleasure from working them out and getting their "point". Dr. Johnson said about the metaphysical poets : "If their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage". The individual reader can form his own opinion about the conceits in this poem.

[illegible]

This poem well illustrates the argumentative quality of much of Donne's verse. The poem shows what is meant by "emotional intellectuality", and is a good example of one of Donne's favourite methods a proposition supported by arguments from analogy. In the first three stanzas the proposition is stated : Let our parting be peaceful and calm. The proposition is supported by two similes or analogies : Let our parting be as peaceful as the deaths of virtuous men and as inconspicuous as the supposed "trepidation" or oscillation, of the crystalline sphere. Then an argument is advanced in support of this proposition : Our love is independent of the senses, and cannot therefore be affected by absence. This argument is illustrated by two analogies : Our two-fold soul will not be broken by absence, but merely expanded by it, like gold beaten into a thin leaf ; or, if we have two souls, they are like the two legs of a compass.

An interpretation of this poem. In *A Valediction : Of Weeping* Donne had suggested that his beloved's lamentations were competing with the tempests on the English Channel :

> Weep me not dead, in thine arms, but forbear
> To teach the sea, what it may do too soon ;
>
> Let not the wind
> Example find,
>
> To do me more harm than it purposeth.

In other words he had asked her to refrain from tears. So, in *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*, he tries to restrain his beloved from indulging in floods of tears and tempests of sighs by fixing her attention on all sorts of difficult things he is finding to say : on the death of virtuous men (lines 1-2), the moving of the earth (lines 9-10), the relation of sense and soul (lines 13-20), the expansion of a gold leaf (line 24) ; for so long as her mind is puzzled with metaphysics, she is likely to remain quiet, more or less. And having posited that their two souls are one, he quickens attention once more by introducing the famous simile, the comparison of the souls with a pair of compasses. It is not really an image, but a puzzle : Why are our two souls like a pair of compasses ? And he keeps her attention fixed on it, producing not one solution but three :

(1) The centre does not turn :

> Thy soul the fix'd foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if th'other do.

(2) If you close the compasses, the spraddled legs grow upright :

> And though it in the centre sit,
> Yet when the other far doth roam,
> It leans, and hearkens after it,
> And grows erect, as that comes home.

(3) The moving foot, when you are drawing a circle, ends where it began, though not, he avoids pointing out, where the stationary foot is :

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
Like th'other foot, obliquely run ;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begun.

"And makes me end, where I begun". These are the words that ring in her grateful ears at the end. They contain scant comfort if she has been following the logic carefully, but probably she has not, and is unlikely to notice that the circle ends as far from its centre as it started. The poem is brilliant, tender in its tone and in its concern, casuistic, a little cynical in its methods, in those final stanzas more than a little meretricious. But there is something meretricious in all attempts at comfort which must seek to wave away some irremediable fact : a death, a parting.

NOTES

Lines 1—4. *A virtuous men......, no*—Good men die calmly, without feeling any agitation. They die so peacefully that even their friends, by their bedside, are not aware of the exact moment of their death.

Line 7. *prophanation*—committing an impious act ; violating the sanctity of something.

Line 8. *layetie.*—laymen, *i.e.*, ordinary people who do not know what true love is.

Lines 5—8. *So let us melt......our love*—Let us part quietly, without making any noise about our parting. Let us not shed tears profusely so as to cause a flood ; let us not heave sighs so as to cause a tempest. We would be violating the sanctity of our love's joy if we announce the grief of our separation to the common people.

Line 9. *Moving of th'earth*—an earthquake.

Line 11. *trepidation of the spheares*—movement of the planets and the heavenly bodies.

Lines 9—12. *Moving of......is innocent*—Mere earthquakes cause fear and alarm. People try to find out the causes of earthquakes and to calculate the damage they did. But when the whole of creation moves, the movement is greater but causes no shock.

Line 13. *sublunary*—pertaining to the earth.

Line 14. *whose soule is sense*—whose love is based on the senses ; whose love is merely physical.

Line 16. *Those things which elemented it*—earthly things of which it was made.

Lines 13—16. *Dull sublunary lovers love......elemented it*—the love of dull, earthly lovers is only of the senses. This kind of love admits of no separation. Separation destroys this kind of love because, being physical in essence, this love evaporates as soon as the bodies of the lovers go out of the sight of each other.

Lines 17—20. *But we by......to misse*—But our love is of so pure an essence that we ourselves cannot understand its nature. We are so assured of existence in each other's minds that the separation of our bodies (eyes, lips and hands) disturbs our love much less.

Lines 21—24. *Our two soules......thinnesse beate*—Our two souls are one. Even though I have to go, my parting does not divide our souls but rather expands them, like gold beaten thin.

breach—division. *Like gold*, etc. When gold is beaten, it does not break because it is not brittle but ductile or flexible or malleable. It can be beaten to the thinness of a leaf. Just as gold expands (to the thinness of a leaf) so our love will also expand with our separation. Also, our love is as precious as gold is.

Lines 25—28. *If they be two......the other doe*—Even if our souls be regarded as two, and not one, they are two like the two legs of a pair of compasses. Your soul is like the fixed leg in the centre of the compass.

Lines 29—36. *And though......where I begunne*—The further my soul goes from yours, the more yours leans towards mine ; and as mine comes home, so yours revives. Your soul is the centre of my being, and keeps mine constant as it circles around you.

18. The Extasie

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
  A Pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest
The violets reclining head,
  Sat we two, one anothers best ;
Our hands were firmely cimented
  With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred
  Our eyes, upon one double string ;

So to'entergraft our hands, as yet
  Was all our meanes to make us one,
And pictures on our eyes to get
  Was all our propagation.

As 'twixt two equall Armies, Fate
  Suspends uncertaine victorie,
Our Soules, (which do advance their state,
  Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her, and mee.

And whil'st our soules negotiate there,
  Wee like sepulchrall statues lay ;
All day, the same our postures were,
  And wee said nothing, all the day.
If any, so by love refin'd,
  That he soules language understood,
And by good love were grown all minde,
  Within convenient distance stood,

He (though he knew not which soule spake,
Because both meant, both spake the same)
Might thence a new concoction take,
And part farre purer than he came.

This Extasie doth unperplex
(We said) and tell us what we love,
Wee see by this, it was not sexe,
Wee see, we saw not what did move :

But as all severall soules containe
Mixture of things, they know not what
Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,
And makes both one, each this and that.

A single violet transplant,
The strength, the colour, and the size,
(All which before was poore, and scant,)
Redoubles still, and multiplies.

When love, with one another so
Interinanimates two soules,
That abler soule, which thence doth flow,
Defects of lonelinesse controules.

Wee then, who are this new soule, know,
Of what we are compos'd, and made,
For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
Are soules, whom no change can invade.

But O alas, so long, so farre
Our bodies why doe wee forbeare ?
They'are ours, though they'are not wee, Wee are
Th'intelligences, they the spheare.

We owe them thankes, because they thus,
Did us, to us, at first convay,
Yeelded their forces, sense, to us,
Nor are drosse to us, but allay.

On man heavens influence workes not so,
But that it first imprints the ayre,
Soe soule into the soule may flow,
Though it to body first repaire.

As our blood labours to beget
Spirits, as like soules as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
That subtile knot, which makes us man.

So must pure lovers soules descend
T'affections, and to faculties,
That sense may reach and apprehend.
Else a great Prince in prison lies.

To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
Weake men on love reveal'd may looke ;
Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
But yet the body is his booke.

And if some lover, such as wee,
Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still marke us, he shall see
Small change, when we'are to bodies gone.

I

Critical Appreciation. In *The Ecstasy* the principal argument is that through the different acts of love the function of man as man is being worthily performed. First there is the position of man between beast and angel. The lovers aspire to the purely intellectual and disembodied state of the angels, and their souls leave their bodies in a dumb and motionless trance. But at the end of the poem they recognize their human limitations and the need of the body and of the senses (which they share with the beasts). If the blood, the main vital agent of the body, strives upwards through the three kinds of spirits it engenders (natural, vital and animal) to the meeting place of body and soul, "that subtile knot, which makes us man", so must the intellectual principle, the soul, be ready to co-operate and on its side to climb down the ladder of being to the region of the senses. Otherwise, great Prince though the soul be, it will yet lack scope and be a prisoner : "Else a great Prince in prison lies".

Nevertheless the ecstasy, though temporary, has done its work : it has "unperplexed" or untied "that subtile knot" and in so doing has made the strands clearer to the view. More precisely it has been an exercise in education ; it has advanced the great human function of self-knowledge :

This Ecstasy doth unperplex
(We said) and tell us what we love,
We see by this, it was not sex,
We see, we saw not what did move.

Through the ecstasy the lovers now realize that they had lacked self-knowledge before : now they know that sex was not the motive. Later on the lovers' souls claim to have reached a degree of self-knowledge beyond any possible reach in an ordinary single soul. In the ordinary state a soul is "perplext", so tied up with the fickle body that utter self-knowledge is out of the question. But this union of two ecstatic souls into an oversoul *does* know itself. It is composed of changeless things, which can be steadily apprehended and studied :

For the Atomies of which we grow,
Are souls, whom no change can invade.

This is the main theme : man's place and function in the scale of creation. But though the cosmic dance is omitted (unless we like to include the cosmic music in the reference to spheres and Intelligences), the corresponding planes are hinted at. The "pregnant bank" at the opening refers forward to physical love at the end and suggests the duplication of erotic function in microcosm and nature. The string that unites the lovers' eyes is double in that it runs from one pair to another pair of eyes, but it is "one" And it would be roughly circular. As such it would correspond to the natural motion of heavenly things, which was not as with the elements up and down but an eternal round : the motion of the soul itself. The angels or intelligences guiding the heavenly spheres correspond to the soul guiding the body ; macrocosm and microcosm again. As the prince is in the state so is the soul in the body and the mental functions of man : body politic and microcosm.

To maintain that *the Ecstasy* deals with the nature of man rather than with a specialized and extraordinary love experience is not to decry the poem. It is rather to enlarge its content and to relate it to a great tragic theme, to Shakespeare when he makes Hamlet compare man to beast and angel.

Of course *The Ecstasy* is in some sort a love-poem, but it cannot be regarded as the expression of hectic passion or as a cynical attempt at seduction. It shows us Donne at his sanest and comparatively detached from his object. It has the cool strong rhythms of *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning* rather than the stormy rhythms of *A Valediction : Of Weeping*. And as for sanity, it allows a healthy scope for the body in subordination to the mind which is quite opposed to Donne's terrible outbursts in the *Second Anniversary* :

> Think that no stubborn sullen Anchorite,
> Which fixt to a pillar, or a grave, doth sit
> Bedded, and bath'd in all his orders, dwells
> So foully as our souls in their first-built cells.

The Ecstasy shows us love as a part of the great human business of living as human beings should.

II

Donne attached significance to the literal meaning of the word "ecstasy"*. But it does not follow that the title of the poem indicates a normal view of the subject, and the poem argues that the important part of this particular ecstasy was the return to the normal integrated life of body and soul. Just as the poem is said to be a dialogue, but of a most unusual nature, "of one", so this ecstasy is unlike any other, because it leads to a heightened awareness of the value of this present life.

In one of his sermons Donne allows the point that in a state of ecstasy or rapture, the soul, leaving the body on the floor or in the bed, may go out to contemplate heavenly things. But he immediately turns from this unimportant and dubious possibility, to the reverse, suggesting the perverse ecstasy of the person whose body is in the house of God but whose soul has gone out to contemplate worldly pleasure or profit. This twist of meaning is characteristic of him. Reading the poem in the light of this passage, one concludes that Donne's attitude to the subject was consistent throughout his life. Significantly, unusually, it is in the past tense; the return to the body, for which it argues, has already taken place.

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*In a letter he wrote : "I make account that the writing of letters, when it is with any seriousness, is a kind of ecstasy, and a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate itself to two bodies......".

Two lovers recline upon a bank, hand in hand, gazing at each other; their bodies are in repose, and their souls go forth from their separate bodies, to meet and become one in an ecstasy (not the usual highly individual experience, but the ecstasy of two persons):

> Our souls, (which to advance their state,
> Were gone out,)…………
> And we said nothing, all the day.

The experience clarifies for both souls the meaning of their love. The climax of the poem is contained in the conclusion, beginning at line 49, enjoining upon the souls the need to return to their bodies—it is not, for example, because, for some unexplained purpose the soul must be disciplined by the body but because without the body the soul cannot express itself to others, who will learn the true meaning of love by reading this "book": Lines 61—end. (The spirits were believed to be vapour-like, rarefied substances in the blood, through which the brain exerted its will over the body, and which united soul and body: cf. the expression "animal spirits").

Donne was a realist who, consistently, included in his poetry the ugly and discordant elements of experience, dissonantly expressed; and who refused to present an escape from the created order, the proper scene of man's activity. These souls advanced their state by going out, in order to return.

Conceits in the poem. 1. The souls of the lovers have left their bodies temporarily and are communicating with each other (like two armies facing each other).

2. The images of the two lovers in each other's eyes are regarded as the lovers' "propagation" or the issue which they have produced.

3. The two souls of the lovers have become one, and the resultant soul is "abler" or finer than each taken singly.

4. The bodies are spheres, and the lovers' minds or souls the intelligences which move the sphere.

NOTES

The Ecstasy is the longest of the "songs and sonets" and the most analytic, conceptual and, in a sense, philosophic of Donne's love-poems. Donne has here "differentiated, distinguished, and interpenetrated with thought a whole area of experience which had hitherto remained undifferentiated and unexplored"

Where, like a pillar……one anothers best (lines 1—4)—The first three lines give us the setting of the poem. There is a raised river-bank which is compared to a pillow lying on a bed. Just as a pillow is higher than the bed on which it lies, so the river-bank rises above the ground. A violet seems to be resting its head on the bank (just as a man rests his head on a pillow). The two lovers, each being the best person from the other's point of view, sat on this bank (*pregnant*—swollen ; rising above the ground and therefore higher than the level of the ground).

One anothers best—The lover is the best man in the whole world, from the woman's point of view, while she is the best woman in the world from his point of view).

The violet's (line 3)—The violet is an emblem of faithful love and truth. (The violet also represents the virtue of "retired humility" because it grows low near the ground and is commonly screened by herbs and other flowers).

Our hands......thence did spring (lines 5-6)—Our hands were tightly clasped. It seemed that a sweet fragrance, which arose from the hands, held them together in a firm grip.

fast balme (line 6). A moisture that preserved us steadfast (In ancient medicine, "balm" was the "natural and inborn preser vative" which, while the bodies retained it kept the lovers from decay

So to' entegraft our hands, as yet......all our propagation (lines 9—12)—This clasping of hands was at this stage our only device to make us one. This was as yet the only means of our union. And the only issue of this union was that we were both reflected in each other's eyes. A sexual union leads to propagation, or reproduction, that is, the birth of children. But in this case there was no "sexual" union. It was a union achieved through only a clasping of hands. The only "issue" in this case was that each of the lovers was reflected in the eyes of the other, because they were fondly gazing into each other's eyes as they sat.

As 'twixt equall Armies......and mee (lines 13—16)—When two armies, equally strong, face each other, it is not certain which of the two will win and whom Fate will favour. At this time our souls, which had left our bodies in order to elevate and exalt themselves, hovered between us facing each other like two armies. "Our souls, leaving our bodies, parleyed with one another like opposing armies". (The armies facing each other are mutually hostile. But the lovers' souls are not hostile to each other. The souls are just measuring each other and interchanging messages),

And whilst our soules......all the day (lines 17—20)—Our souls were exchanging messages and communicating with each other. During this period our bodies lay like lifeless statues. Our bodies continued to lie in the same postures all the time and we did not speak a single word to each other all day. (The bodies of the lovers are passive and silent ; only the souls are holding negotiations with each other) (*sepulchral*—pertaining to a sepulchre or tomb ; death-like ; lifeless)

If any, so by love refin'd......then he came (lines 21—28)—Suppose there had been a spectator to witness this scene. Suppose that this spectator were a person so refined and purified by love that he could understand the language which souls speak. Suppose that this person had, by the influence of the noble passion of love, been raised to the position of pure intellect. Then this person, standing within a convenient distance, would have understood what our two souls were saying to each other, though he would not have been able to distinguish the speech of one soul from the speech of the other soul because both souls spoke the same thing and also meant the same thing. (There was thus a complete identification of the two souls). That person, hearing the two souls, would eventually have gone away from the place a far purer being than before because he would acquire a purer essence from our souls' conversation. (*a new concoction*—a new combination of elements to make up the soul).

This Extasie—This condition in which the soul has separated itself from the body ; this exalted state of the soul. (*extasie—ecstasy*).

doth unperplex—does explain ; removes the perplexity ; solves the riddle ; throws light on.

This extasie doth unperplex......each this, and that (lines 29—36)—This exalted condition of our souls enlightens us as to the nature of love. We now realize that the basis of our love for each other was not sex (or, the desire to enjoy sexual pleasure). Previously we did not understand what it was that moved our hearts and propelled us towards each other. Now we understand the mystery. All the various souls are made up of a mixture of certain elements the nature of which is not known to them. When two persons fall in love with each other, love effects a new mixture, the mingling of their two souls into one. Their two souls are no longer separate entities but have become one.

A single violet and......multiplies (lines 37—40)—If a violet be transplanted, an improvement in the strain takes place. That violet may have been lacking in strength, colour and size but it gains in all respects as a result of the transplant. The transplant thus enriches the violet and enhances its charm. (To "transplant" means to uproot a plant from one place and plant it elsewhere. This process leads to the plant gaining in strength and colour). The significance of this phenomenon is brought out in the lines that follow.

When love, with one another......controules (lines 41—44)—When love brings about a union or fusion of two souls, the resultant soul will be superior to both those souls. The single soul which grows out of the union of two is finer than either singly. This new soul is also free from the defects from which each separately suffered. The new soul makes up the deficiency in each of those two souls. (*Defects of lonelinesse*—defects of each lonely or single soul before it was united with the other soul).

We then, who are this new soule......can invade (lines 45—48)—Then we, who have become a new soul, begin to understand what elements have gone into the making of our new soul. And we know that we are now composed only of the unchangeable material of souls. (*atomies*—atoms ; tiny particles of which souls are made).

But, O alas ! so long......we forbeare ? (lines 40—50)—There is now a new development of thought in the poem. The lover regrets that due importance is not given to the body. We should not deny to give to the body the place it deserves. (*forbear*—to refrain from using ; not to make use of).

They're ours, though they're not wee (line 51)—The bodies belong to us. They are not something foreign to us. It is true that the bodies are not we : in other words, human beings are not just "bodies" ; the essence of a human being lies in his soul. But the body belongs to the human being and cannot be divorced or discarded.

Wee are Th' intelligences, they the spheare (lines 51-52)—Our bodies may be compared to the spheres or the planets of which we, or our souls, are the informing spirits. Just as the spheres are moved by the intelligences which dwell in them, so our bodies are moved by our souls. Our bodies are thus the spheres in which we or our souls move. (There is a reference here to Ptolemy's belief that the spheres were inhabited by intelligences or invisible spirits which governed the movements of the spheres).

We owe them thankes......to us (lines 535-5)—We should feel grateful to our bodies because they first conveyed to us their faculties. Through the bodies we became aware of our senses. Through the bodies we, the lovers, got close to each other. (*yielded*—provided ; supplied. *forces*—faculties. *sense*—physical senses of sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing).

Nor are drosse to us, but allay (line 56)—Our bodies are not something worthless to be discarded. They should be regarded as the alloy which, when mixed with gold, makes the precious metal work better. (Gold ornaments can be made only after some alloy has been mixed with gold. The body is here compared to an alloy while the soul is compared to gold. Thus it is through the bodies that the souls can come together and love one another. Spiritual love would be impossible without the body. The body dilutes the soul in the same way as an alloy dilutes gold).

Drosse. The impurities which came to the surface when gold (or some other precious metal) is melted ; something worthless. *allay*—alloy ; an inferior metal which is mixed with molten gold before gold ornaments can be made.

On man heavens influence......imprints the air (lines 57-58)—The influence of the stars affects human beings only through the air. Heavenly bodies (*i.e.*, stars) influence human beings only through the medium of the air.

So soule into the soule......repaire (lines 59-60)—In the same way a soul unites with another soul only after both souls have entered bodies. In other words, souls are united only through the agency of the bodies.

As our blood labours......which makes us man (lines 61-64)—As our blood strives to produce the vital energies without which we cannot function as men, so the souls of lovers must express themselves through physical communication. (*labours*—strives ; tries hard. *to beget*—to produce. *spirits*—animal spirits ; vital energies. *as like soule sas it can*—resembling souls as much as possible. *to knit*—to weave. *That subtile knot, which makes us man*—that mysterious and intricate pattern or instrument by means of which we can function as human beings.

So must pure lovers soules......in prison lies (lines 65—68)—In the same way the souls of pure lovers must make use of emotions and physical energies which can be perceived and recognized by our bodies, because otherwise the souls will not be able to express themselves, like a great prince who is confined to prison and is unable to appear to his people. In other words, the souls of lovers must reveal and express themselves through bodily contact and physical communication ; otherwise there is no means by which love can express itself. *descend*—come down from a height ; bend ; stoop. *affections* —feelings or emotions physically experienced ; sensations. *faculties* —physical energies).

To our bodies......may looke (lines 69-70)—Let our souls then return to our bodies so that in our physical union ordinary men may see the mystery of love revealed. (*weak men*—ordinary people who can perceive the truths of life only through their senses. The mystery of love can be understood by these people only if love reveals itself bodily or through the medium of the body).

Loves mysteries......is his booke (lines 71-72)—It is true that mysteries of love have their abode in souls but the body is a kind of book through which those mysteries are revealed to others (just as the mysteries of religion are revealed to ordinary people through a book called the Bible).

And if some lover......to bodies gone (lines 73—76). And if some lover who resembles us (the speaker and his beloved) has heard this "dialogue of one", let him look at us closely and he will find that when our souls return to our bodies we will be little changed. ("If there is small change when the souls are to bodies gone, then spiritual love has succeeded in controlling passion").

this dialogue of one. The dialogue of the two lovers' souls which are in fact one.

19. Loves Deitie

I long to talke with some old lovers ghost,
  Who dyed before the god of Love was borne :
I cannot thinke that hee, who the lov'd most,
  Sunke so low, as to love one which did scorne.
But since this god produc'd a destinie,
And that vice-nature, custome, lets it be ;
  I must love her, that loves not mee,
Sure, they which made him god, meant not so much :
  Nor he, in his young godhead practis'd it.
But when an even flame two hearts did touch,
  His office was indulgently to fit

Actives to passives : Correspondencie
Only his subject was. It cannot bee
Love, till I love her, that loves mee.

But every moderne god will now extend
His vast prerogative, as far as Jove.
To rage, to lust, to write to, to commend,
All is the purlewe of the God of Love.
Oh were wee wak'ned by this Tyrannie
To'ungod this child againe, it could not bee
That I should love, who loves not mee.

Rebell and Atheist too, why murmure I,
As though I felt the worst that love could doe ?
Love might make me leave loving, or might trie
A deeper plague, to make her love mee too,
Which, since she loves before, I'am loth to see ;
Falshood is worse than hate ; and that must bee,
If shee whom I love, should love mee.

Critical Appreciation. *Love's Deity* illustrates well the realism with which Donne can write about the idea of the love-relationship The famous opening ("I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,/Who died before the god of Love was born") propounds the warning that love has many meanings, and that the modern torment of unrequited love is very different from the love of olden times. By 'the god of Love" Donne clearly means all the anguish available in his time to the psychologically-instructed intellectual who is so unwise as to submit to the human bondage of loving her "who loves not me". Before love was deified (that is, made a cult), it was simple and true. The original office or function of Cupid is thus stated in the poem :

His office was indulgently to fit
Actives to passives.
Correspondency only his subject was.

Donne recognises, even in "true love", the abiding Platonic principle that one will call and one will answer, that one will pursue and the other pursued. But nevertheless, in the "golden age", Cupid stepped in only "when an even flame two hearts did touch", and the conclusion to this, the second stanza, is firm :

It cannot be
Love, till I love her, that loves me.

But nowadays all the modern talk about "love" means something far more complex. It is no longer a simple matter of correspondency. Love for a young intellectual has become a slavery to a sort of wretched passion. If only we could wake up and could see that "romantic" love meant nothing but misery, we could get rid of all its nonsensical apparatus of "rage, lust, letter writing, commendations", and free ourselves from affairs with those who care nothing for us.

But in the last stanza, we feel the sting in the tail. The argument here may be stated thus : "My complaints are unwise because this is not the worst that love could do to a man. It might turn me against loving altogether : that is, it might prevent the possibility of a future genuine relationship. The game must go on for the sake of a possible victory one day ; or, worst of all, she might suddenly feel the same way about me as I do now about her. If she did, this would only add lies to indifference. I know that she has loved someone before. If she should now fall for me, it would prove her earlier declarations to the other man to be false. Her new declarations to me will therefore be unreliable also". In this last stanza, with its analysis of the meaning of "love", Donne states a possibility in such a way as to dispense with any whole-hearted immersion of one's feelings in the finality of that possibility. He can write about love with detachment as effectively as he can write about it with emotion. In this poem he seeks invulnerability from the god of love by building up a logical, ironic defence against him.

Conceits in this poem. 1. The poet wishes to talk with some old lover's ghost (as if this were possible).

2. Every modern god, like Cupid, tries to extend his power and authority in order to equal Jove.

3. The god of love might make the poet stop loving altogether, or make his beloved respond to his love—which would be worse because she already loves somebody.

NOTES

Stanza I. *I long to talke......which did scorne* (lines 1—4)—I have a great desire to talk with the ghost of some old lover who lived, loved, and died before the birth of the god of love (that is, Cupid). I would like to exchange my ideas with the ghost of that lover and would like to know the conditions that prevailed in the sphere of love before Cupid took charge of affairs in this department of life. I cannot believe that a lover in those times degraded himself so much as to love a woman who held him in contempt. (The idea is that nowadays a man may love a woman who does not respond to his love and who does not care for him at all. But that could not have been the case before Cupid appeared on the scene).

But since this god......that loves not mee (lines 5—7)—But when this god, Cupid, came into the world, conditions changed. It became a custom, then, that men might even love women who scorned them. Such is the destiny of present-day lovers. I am a victim of that destiny and that custom, with the result that I must love the woman who does not love me.

Stanza II. *Sure, they which made him god......Actives to passives* (lines 8—12)—I am sure that the authorities who appointed Cupid to be god of love did not give him so much power (that is, they did not want that this god should make men love women who did not respond to them). Nor did Cupid introduce this practice, or malpractice, in the early days of his godhood. In the early days of his new authority, he merely performed the function of bringing together two hearts which had been kindled by each other. In those days, Cupid was accommodating enough to make a woman respond to a man's love. *Actives*—those who love. *Passives*—those who are loved).

Correspondencie/Only his subject was—Cupid's only function in those early days was to see that a man and a woman suited each other as lovers. Cupid merely used to ensure the mutual suitability of lovers.

It cannot bee/Love, till I love her, that loves mee (lines 12—14)—If a woman loves me and I do not love her, it cannot be said that there is love between us. Love comes into being only when both the man and the woman are attracted towards each other. Love is a matter of mutuality.

Stanza III. *But every moderne god......as far as Jove* (lines 15—16)—But it has become the tendency of every god in our times to go on adding to his powers arbitrarily till he becomes as mighty as Jove, the supreme god. Every modern god tends to arrogate to himself powers which were not intended for him.

To rage, to lust......the God of Love (lines 17-18)—Now Cupid thinks that it is within his power to make men fall in love even with women who scorn them. The lovers of today experience an intense desire for their beloveds ; they write feverish love-letters to their beloveds ; they try to curry favour with their beloveds ; they grow furious, and they fret and fume when they get no response. But Cupid allows all this to happen (*purlewe* or *purlieu*—bounds ; limits ; *i.e.*, within the jurisdiction).

Oh were wee waken'd......who loves not mee (lines 19—21)—Oh, if it were possible for us to get rid of the tyranny of Cupid by dethroning him, then it would no longer be necessary for me to go on loving my beloved who does not respond to my love.

(*To ungod this child againe*—to remove this child from the position of a god. Cupid is a child-god. In other words, Cupid has been conceived of as a child ; he is also depicted as armed with a bow and arrows ; whoever is hit by his arrow falls in love).

Stanza IV. *Rebell and Athiest too......I'm loth to see* (lines 22—26)—It is wrong on my part to speak like a rebel and an unbeliever. I should not revolt against the authority of Cupid, nor should I talk about displacing him from his position, or defying his authority. I should not grumble against him. After all, he has not done the worst that he could do to me. He has, of course, been unkind to me, but he could have been even more unkind. He could, for instance, have made me stop loving altogether, and that would have been a misfortune. He could have inflicted a greater cruelty on me : he could have made my beloved respond to my love, and this position I would have been unwilling to accept because, I know, that she already loves somebody else. (Her loving me would thus be a falsehood both to me and to her previous lover or lovers). (The argument has been given a new turn here).

Falsehood is worse than hate……should love mee (lines 27—28)—It is better to hate a man openly than to make a pretence of loving him. If the woman whom I love begins to love me too, she will be deceiving me because she is already in love with somebody else. I would prefer her scorn of me to her deceiving me.

20. The Will

Before I sigh my last gaspe, let me breath,
Great love, some Legacies, Here I bequeath
Mine eyes to *Argus*, if mine eyes can see,
If they be blinde, then Love, I give them thee ;
My tongue to Fame ; to'Embassadours mine ears ;
To women or the sea, my teares.
Thou, Love, has taught mee heretofore
By making mee serve her who'had twenty more,
That I should give to none, but such, as had too much before

My constancie I to the planets give ;
My truth to them, who at the Court doe live ;
Mine ingenuity and opennesse,
To Jesuites ; to Buffones my pensivenesse ;
My silence to any, who abroad hath beene ;
My mony to a Capuchin.
Thou Love taught'st me, by'appointing mee
To love there, where no love receiv'd can be,
Onely to give to such as have an incapacitie.

My faith I give to Roman Catholiques ;
All my good works unto the Schismatiks
Of Amsterdam ; my best civility
And Courtship, to an Universitie ;
My modesty I give to souldiers bare ;
My patience let gamesters share.
Thou Love taughtst mee, by making mee
Love her that holds my love disparity,
Onely to give to those that count my gifts indignity.

I give my reputation to those
Which were my friends ; Mine industrie to foes ;
To Schoolemen I bequeath my doubtfulnesse ;
My sicknesse to Physitians, or excesse ;
To Nature, all that in Ryme have writ ;
And to my company my wit.
Thou Love, by making mee adore
Her, who begot this love in mee before,
Taughtst me to make, as though I gave, when I did but restore.

To him for whom the passing bell next tolls,
I give my physick bookes ; my writen rowles
Of Morall counsels, I to Bedlam give ;
My brazen medals, unto them which live
In want of bread ; To them which passe among
All forrainers, mine English tongue.
Thou, Love, by making mee love one
Who thinkes her friendship a fit portion
For yonger lovers, dost my gifts thus disproportion.

Therefore I'll give no more ; But I'll undoe
The world by dying ; because love dies too.
Then all your beauties will bee no more worth
Than gold in Mines, where none doth draw it forth ;
And all your graces no more use shall have
Than a Sun dyall in a grave.
Thou Love taughtst mee, by making mee
Love her, who doth neglect both mee and thee,
To'invent, and practise this one way, to'annihilate all three.

Critical Appreciation. As the title shows, this poem is the author's will or testament. But it is a **witty poem**, and has no serious import or significance. Its real subject is love. The poet's beloved has rejected him. She is faithless and inconstant. So the poet conveys his thoughts and feelings about this woman in a succession of **conceits and paradoxes**. The poem is, too, an excellent example of the **argumentative quality** which characterizes much of Donne's verse.

The poet wishes to make a number of bequests. Each bequest at first puzzles us because of its paradoxical nature, but each bequest acquires a meaning in the last three lines of the stanza in which it occurs. The **symmetrical and logical construction** of the poem is one of its outstanding features.

In the **first stanza**, the poet wishes to convey the idea that the woman he fell in love with was one who already had too many lovers. So he gave his love to one who had already too much of it. In the light of this fact, he bequeathes his eyes to Argus (if the poet's eyes can still see after his death) and to Cupid (if the poet's eyes can no longer see) ; he bequeathes his tongue to gossip-mongers ; his ears to ambassadors ; his tears to women or to the sea.

In the **second stanza,** the beloved is depicted as one who proved incapable of receiving the poet's love. So the poet bequeathes certain legacies to those who can make no use of them—his constancy to planets (which are inconstant) ; his truth to courtiers (who always tell lies) ; his openness to Jesuits (who are secretive) ; and so on.

In the **third stanza,** the beloved is shown as one who regarded the poet's love as an indignity or insult. Accordingly, he bequeathes his faith to Roman Catholics (who, because of their own zealous faith will regard this legacy as an insult) ; his good works to the Schismatics of Amsterdam (who think themselves already too pious to need good deeds) ; and so on.

In the **fourth stanza,** the poet says that his love, having been aroused in him by his beloved, need not have been offered to her (because she herself was its source). So he bequeathes his reputation to his friends (who were the cause of it) ; his industry to his foes ; his scepticism to schoolmen ; his sickness to physicians, or to excess ; and so on. In each case the gift goes back to where it came from.

In the **fifth stanza,** the beloved is accused of regarding the poet's love for her as being inappropriate because she needs younger lovers. For this reason the poet leaves his medical books to those who are dead ; his moral counsels to madmen ; his English language to foreigners ; and so on. The gift in each case here is simply unwanted as being valueless.

In the **final stanza,** the poet decides to undo the world by dying. If he dies, true love dies. If true love dies, the beloved will die because there will be nobody left sincerely to admire her beauty. Thus, if the beloved can neglect the poet and she can neglect love, the poet will destroy all the three (himself, love, and the beloved).

It is the poet's **ingenuity** that astonishes us to here. The poem teems with images which the writer's fertile imagination calls up from every quarter. Argus, Capuchins, Roman Catholics, Schoolmen, Physicians, Jesuits, the buffoons, the Schismatics, the Court, Bedlam—all these fall within the scope of the poem, and most appropriately, though unexpectedly. The logic of the reasoning is irresistible. The poet's **satirical talent** finds a full outlet here. It is not only the beloved who is ridiculed but gossip-mongers, ambassadors, courtiers, soldiers, doctors and others. Indeed, the poem provides plenty of fun and entertainment. The poet's general outlook as expressed here is cynical but there is no bitterness. Donne has been called "the monarch of wit" and this poem is an excellent illustration of his genius in this field.

Conceits in the poem. 1. The poet speaks of legacies not in the material sense (wealth, property, etc.) but in terms of qualities capacity to talk, capacity to hear, constancy, truth, openness, pensiveness, faith, good works, civility, and so on. (The only material things mentioned are money for a Capuchin, and brazen medals for the hungry). He speaks of these things as if these qualities could really be treated as transferable possessions.

2. The poet thinks that he can undo the world by dying, because with his death love too will die.

3. The poet says that, after his death, the beloved's beauties and graces will no longer have any value.

4. The poet's death will mean the "annihilation of all three" : himself, love and the beloved.

NOTES

Stanza I. *Before I sigh my last gaspe* (line 1)—Before I die.

Let me breath (line 1)—Let me breathe ; let me speak ; let me utter.

Legacies—what is left by a dying (or dead) man to his relatives, friends, and others. *bequeath*—leave as a legacy.

Argus (line 3)—a giant who had a hundred eyes and was therefore extremely watchful.

Love (line 4)—the god of love, who is blind. Cupid is represented as a blind god. That is why we say that love is blind.

Fame (line 5)—common report ; rumour ; gossip.

her who had twenty more (line 8)—my beloved who had twenty more lovers besides me.

That I should......before (line 9)—that I should leave my possessions to those who already had an excess of what I was leaving for them.

Stanza II. *to the planets*—the planets keep moving in their orbits. So constancy would be a contrary gift for them.

who at the court doe live—Courtiers are known for their untruthfulness or unreliability. Truth would not therefore be welcome to them as a legacy.

ingenuity (line 12)—The word "ingenuity" is here used to mean "ingenuousness" or "candour" or "frankness".

Jesuites (line 13)—Jesuits or members of the Jesuit order were known for their subtleness which tended to conceal the truth. Openness or frankness would therefore not be acceptable to them.

Buffones (line 13)—buffoons ; clowns ; comedians. *pensiveness*—melancholy ; thoughtfulness. (What would a clown do with melancholy ?)

who abroad hath beene (line 14)—He who has travelled abroad talks glibly about the things he has seen. He does not therefore need "silence" as a gift.

Capuchin (line 15)—The Capuchins were monks who had vowed to live a life of absolute poverty. Money would be no attraction to a Capuchin.

where no love receiv'd can be (line 17)—the woman who is incapable of receiving love because she simply cannot love anybody.

as have an incapacitie (line 18). those who are incapable of receiving.

Stanza III. *My faith......Catholiques* (line 19)—Roman Catholics are regarded as fanatical believers in their religion. Offering "faith" to them would be an insult to them.

the Schismaticks/of Amsterdam—Schismatics were an extreme Puritan sect. The idea of salvation by good works was offensive to them, because their purity did not need the help of good deeds.

my best civility......an Universitie (lines 21-22)—A university teaches civility and courtesy. To make a gift of courtesy to a university would therefore be an insult to it. (*civility*—politeness. *courtship*—courtliness ; courtesy).

My modesty......bare (line 23)—Soldiers are boastful. Modesty would not accord well with this trait in them.

gamesters (line 24)—gamblers. Gamblers are rash and reckless. To offer patience to them would enrage them.

that holds my love disparity (line 26)—my beloved who considers my love insulting because she thinks that I am beneath her. She does not think me worthy of her attention.

indignity (line 27)—insult ; disgrace.

Stanza IV. *I give my reputation......my friends* (line 28-29)—My reputation is due to the goodwill of my well-wishers. I now give my reputation back to those who are its source.

Mine industrie to foes (line 29)—My foes made me watchful and vigilant. They made me industrious so that I took pains to protect myself against them and to hit them back when necessary. Now I give back my industry to them, from when I derived it.

To Schoolmen......doubtfulnesse (line 30)—I give back my doubt to those from whom I got it. (Schoolmen were academic metaphysicians, whose hair-splitting contradictions of each other only raise doubt or scepticism).

My sickness......excesse (line 31)—I leave my sickness to its sources. My sickness was due either to doctors and physicians or to the excess of some element in my bodily constitution. Let them now have it back. (There is a fling here on physicians).

Stanza V. *To him for whom......bookes* (lines 37-38)—I bequeathe my medical books to those who are dead or dying (because those books are of no use to them)

my written rowles......to Bedlam give (line 38-39)—I bequeath all morel counsels, recorded or written by me, to the inmates of a madhouse because those people will not find this gift to be of any use. (*Bedlam*—a madhouse ; an asylum for insane people).

brazen medals—ancient bronze coins (with which one cannot buy anything in the market)

forrainers—foreigners.

For young lovers......disproportion (line 45)—My beloved wants young lovers. I being an older man, my love is of no use to her.

Stanza VI. *Because love dies too* (line 47)—With the death of the poet, love in this world will also die. Thus the world will be undone or ruined.

Then all your beauties......forth (lines 48-49)—The beauty of the beloved will then become useless because there will be no true ver left in the world to appreciate her beauty. Her beauty will become valueless like the gold which lies buried in a mine from where nobody can dig it out.

a Sun dyall in a grave (line 51)—A sun-dial indicates the time of the day. But, if it lies in a grave, it is of no use to anybody.

who doth neglect both mee and thee (line 53)—The beloved neglects the poet who loves her truly. But thereby she also neglects love (or the god of love). She insults love by rejecting the poet and seeking pleasure (instead of true love) in the company of younger men.

To invent......all three (line 56)—By dying, I shall be killing all three—myself, love, and the beloved. When I die, love dies. When love dies, the world is undone. In such a world nobody will value the beloved's beauty, and so she dies too.

21. The Relique

When my grave is broke up againe
Some second guest to entertaine,
(For graves have learn'd that woman-head
To be to more than one a Bed)
And he that digs it, spies
A bracelet of bright haire about the bone,
Will he not let' us alone,
And thinke that there a loving couple lies,
Who thought that this device might be some way
To make their soules, at the last busie day,
Meet at this grave, and make a litle stay ?

If this fall in a time, or land,
Where mis-devotion doth command,
Then, he that digges us up, will bring
Us, to the Bishop, and the King,
To make us Reliques ; then
Thou shalt be' a Mary Magdalen, and I
A something else thereby ;
All women shall adore us, and some men ;
And since at such times, miracles are sought,
I would that age were by this paper taught
What miracles wee harmelesse lovers wrought.

First, we lov'd well and faithfully,
Yet knew not what wee lov'd, nor why,
Difference of sex no more wee knew,
Than our Guardian Angells doe ;
Comming and going, wee
Perchance might kisse, but not between those meales ;
Our hands ne'er toucht the seales,
Which nature, injur'd by late law, sets free :
These miracles wee did ; but now alas,
All measure, and all language, I should passe,
Should I tell what a miracle shee was.

Critical Appreciation. *The Relic* (also spelt as ***The Relique***) is one of Donne's most celebrated and characteristic poems. It shows Donne's peculiar wit, which we might call fancy. The grave of the poet, dug up at a future point of time, reveals him wearing round his arm a lock of a woman's hair. Let the digger of the grave, Donne says, fancy that this was our device to stay together—as we were in life—without bodily togetherness. Then it might happen, in an un-Christian or wrongly Christian land, that I am adored as a relic—the "something else" is presumably Christ : in that case, we ought to provide some miracles in advance. But we have done that : we have provided the miracle of a Platonic love-affair, to conduct which a woman must herself be something of a miracle.

Such a fancy makes no sense outside the sphere of poetry. It is, empirically, meaningless : its propositions remain untestable hypotheses ; but it has produced a brilliant and curiously moving poem ; for although the tone and the suggestions are light*, yet the basic situation of the despoiled grave, and the passion of the sixth line**, supply the necessary underlying reality in terms which cannot be taken wholly non-seriously.

The Relic is a new kind of love-poem. There is the love of the dead poet as it is actually supposed to have been, described in the last stanza. There is the device, introduced at the beginning of the poem, by which the poet fancies himself, before death, to have symbolised his love-story even in the grave. In between, there is the result fancied as possibly arising from such a love-affair :

All women shall adore us, and some men.

This line, neatly hitting off a sexual difference of attitude both to religion and to love, is central to the poem. Women take both forms of adoration, on the whole, more seriously than men. Donne slyly points out that he does not suppose his fancy will take in his own sex, the fanciful sex, wholesale, as it will take in women, the literal sex. The poem imagines true love commemorated in a symbol (the bracelet) of passionate, but purely private and profane, emotional significance—"Will he not let us alone ?" Then is introduced the dig at (chiefly) feminine literalness and gullibility—if the dead lovers are not left alone, it will be because the bracelet has given someone the absurd idea that they are relics of religious power. Yet this fantastic possibility can be justified, and it is justified in the poem, by means of that central image of the bracelet which, with the line "All women shall adore us, and some men", is the key to the poem's meaning. The bracelet, meant to equal true love, will be thought to equal "miracle". But true love *is* a miracle. The play on the word "miracle" produces subtly inter-locking ideas of profane and sacred love which the fantastic poet can reconcile even as he demonstrates how the literal and gullible will confuse them.

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*The poet willingly and constantly puts himself in another's place and regards himself with amused detachment.

**"A bracelet of bright hair about the bone".

Thus the metaphysical and ideal conceit is capable of producing a poem which is fantastic without affectation, witty without triviality, and original without absurdity. *The Relic* can give satisfaction as a work of art although it treats the traditional theme of love in an unconventional manner. It is a less serious poem than, say, *The Ecstasy*, because it treats love less intensely, less universally, and says less about man, the ultimate subject of all verse. Its tone blends passion, romance, and the grave in an urbane, civilized but slightly outre* manner.

Conceits in the poem. 1. When the grave is opened, the dead lover will still be found wearing the beloved's bright hair round his wrist-bone as a bracelet.

2. The souls of the lovers will meet at this grave on the Judgment Day.

3. He who digs the grave will then take the lover's bone and the beloved's bright hair to the Bishop and the King, and these things will become relics.

4. The beloved will be a Mary Magdalen, and the lover "a something else".

NOTES

The word "relic" means anything that is sacred as being associated with some great ascetic or saint. A relic may be a bone or a bit of hair of a saint or anything else that belonged to him and which is believed to have a sacred character.

Stanza I. *When my grave is broke up……Some second guest to entertaine* (lines 1-2)—When my grave is opened in order to accommodate some other dead body. (It was the practice in Donne's times to open existing graves in order to bury other dead bodies)

For graves have learn'd……a Bed (lines 3-4)—The poet here ironically remarks that graves have learned to accommodate more than one body just as women accommodate more than one body in their beds. We have here a fling at women's inconstancy and infidelity. Just as a woman may allow one lover to lie with her in her bed today and another lover another day, so graves too can accommodate more than one body. (The mixture of serious and the non-serious here is to be noticed). A talk about death and graves is a solemn matter, but the poet makes it an occasion for a witty attack on women.

And he that digs it, spies……and make a little stay (lines 5-11) - He who digs my grave will see a curl of bright hair wound around my wrist-bone. He might then let me remain in the grave undisturbed. Seeing me with a woman's bright hair around my wrist-bone, he will think that a loving couple lies in the grave and, out of respect for our love, he will not dig any further. He will understand that I had wound a curl of my beloved's bright hair round my **wrist-bone** in order that she and I might remain together. He will also understand that I used this device in order that my soul and my beloved's soul can meet each other at this grave on the Judgment Day, and can stay here together a little while. (*At the last busy day*—on the Judgment Day or the Doomsday when there will be lot of hustle and bustle. It is believed that on the Judgment Day the living will die and the dead will rise from their graves. So this lover imagines that, on the Judgment Day, his soul and his beloved's soul will meet at this grave because of his beloved's hair which he wears on his wrist-bone like a bracelet).

**outre*—exaggerated ; strained.

Stanza II. *If this fall in a time, or land/Where mis-devotion doth command* (lines 12-13)—If this happens at a time when, or in a land where, pagan beliefs prevail.

Then, he that......To make us Reliques (lines 14-16)—Then he, who has dug the grave and discovered the bracelet of bright hair about my bone, will carry me to the priest or to the king as some thing wonderful. Then my bone and your (the beloved's) hair will be treated as relics.

then/Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I/A something else thereby (lines 17-18)—Then both you and I will become objects of worship. You (my beloved) will be treated like Mary Magdalen, and I shall be treated like Christ, maybe. (Mary Magdalen, whose story occurs in the Bible, was a reformed prostitute who, after her transformation, came to be highly respected. She was present at the Crucifixion, and it was to her that Jesus is said to have first appeared after the Resurrection. "A something else" may either mean Christ who was Mary Magdalen's saviour, or may just mean "not myself but somebody other, superior").

All women shall adore us, and some men (line 19)—We shall then be worshipped by all women and we shall be worshipped by some men also. "All women", because women are on the whole more religious-minded and more reverential towards sacred things ; they are more credulous also. "Some men", because all men are not so religious as women and not so reverential or credulous.

And since at such time......lovers wrought (lines 20-22)—And because people expect miracles to be performed by saints, this poem of mine will tell the people that time what miracles we harmless lovers performed.

Stanza III. *First, we lov'd well......but not between those meales* (lines 23-28)—The first miracle we performed was that we loved each other faithfully and truly, though, in our innocence, we did not know what we loved in each other and why. We were so innocent that we did not even know that we belonged to different sexes. In this respect we were as innocent as the angels who protect human beings. (This was the second miracle). On meeting and on leaving each other, we might perhaps have kissed each other, but we did so innocently without knowing that a kiss meant anything more than the touching of lips. (The third miracle). And even such innocent kisses we never exchanged at all times, but only on formal occasions: coming and going. (*meals*—This word is here used to mean "kisses". It can also be interpreted literally : We kissed each other only when we got together for meals, and not on other occasions).

Our hands ne'er toucht......wee did (lines 29-30)—We never violated the restrictions placed on love-making by social morality, though not by nature. Nature does not impose any restraints upon lovers. But man-made laws do not permit the same freedom to lovers. You and I loved each other but we complied with man-made laws and did not avail the freedom which nature grants. The idea is that their love continued to be pure or spiritual and that they did not enjoy any sexual pleasures.

These miracles wee did (line 31)—Such were the miracles we performed. (It was indeed a miracle that the lovers should have exercised so much self-denial as to refrain from the sexual act). In all three miracles have been mentioned.

But now alas,/All measure......a miracle shee was (lines 32-33)—But now, alas, I must transcend the limitations of language if I have to describe what a miracle my beloved was. (No words can describe the marvellous beauty and charm of my beloved).

22. The Expiration

So, so, breake off this last lamenting kisse,
Which sucks two soules, and vapors both away,
Turne thou ghost that way and let mee turne this,
And let our selves benight our happiest day,
We ask'd none leave to love ; nor will we owe
Any, so cheape a death, as saying, Goe ;

Goe ; and if that word have not quite kill'd thee,
Ease mee with death, by bidding mee goe too.
Oh, if it have, let my word worke on mee,
And a just office on a murderer doe.
Except it be too late, to kill me so,
Being double dead, going, and bidding, goe.

Critical Appreciation. *The Expiration* is a passionate love poem. But even here the passion is interwoven with reasoning. Here is a perfect example of that "emotional intellectuality" which is one of the dominant qualities of Donne's poetry and, in fact, of all the metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century. The lovers are about to part, and they are kissing each other good-bye. But this last kiss seems to suck the lives out of them, leaving them as mere ghosts of themselves. They are going to part, but they would like to part voluntarily and not at somebody else's bidding because they never asked anyone's permission to love and because, for this reason, nobody else should have the right to ask them to part. The lover imagines that his saying the word "go" to his beloved has already killed her. If there is still some life left in her, let her speak the same word to him and thus kill him. But if she is already dead, let the word "go" spoken by him kill him too because he is the murderer of his beloved. But, he concludes, he is perhaps already "doubly dead". He is dead because he told her to go, and he is dead because he parted from her. Donne's manner of arguing the matter is not simple, though the vocabulary of the poem is perfectly simple.

NOTES

Stanza I. *So, so breake off......and vapors both away* (lines 1-2)—Let this last mournful kiss come to an end now. This kiss is proving fatal to us because it sucks the life out of your soul and it sucks the life out of my soul too. This kiss destroys both of us.

Turne thou ghost that way......our happiest day (lines 3-4) Now that you are dead and I am also dead, only our ghosts remain. (They are dead because the "last lamenting kiss" has sucked the life out of them). Let your ghost go that way, and my ghost go the other way. (In other words, let us part from each other now). And let us, by this parting, darken the happiest day of our life. (This is the happiest day probably because they have crowned the day with a kiss).

We ask'd none......Goe (lines 5-6)—Let us not wait till someone comes to part us). We asked no one's permission to love each other. Nor should we expect anybody to speak the word of parting to us and to bid us leave each other. We will not allow anyone to speak the word "go" and thus cause us to die (because of our separation). We shall separate voluntarily and not at any one's bidding.

Stanza II. *Goe ; and if that word......goe too* (lines 7-8)—Go, then. And if my asking you to go has not killed you completety, kill me by asking me to go. (He means that his asking her to leave him must have already killed her with the grief of parting. But if any life is still left in her, let her also speak the word "go" to him so that he may die of similar grief).

Oh, if it have......and bidding goe (lines 9—12)—But if my asking you to leave me has already killed you, may the word "go" spoken by me have its effect on me and kill me also ! Being your murderer, I should be punished with death, and let my own word "go" perform the act of execution on me, unless it be too late for me to die in this way, because I may already be doubly dead by (*i*) parting from you, and (*ii*) telling you to go.

23. The Indifferent

I can love both faire and browne,
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betraies,
Her who loves lonenesse best, and her who maskes and plaies,
Her whom the country form'd, and whom the town,
Her who beleeves, and her who tries,
Her who still weepes with spungie eyes,
And her who is dry corke, and never cries ;
I can love her, and her, and you and you,
I can love any, so she be not true.

Will no other vice content you ?
Will it not serve your turn to do, as did your mothers ?
Or have you all old vices spent, and now would finde out other ?
Or doth a feare, that men are true, torment you ?
Oh we are not, be not you so,
Let mee, and doe you, twenty know.
Rob mee, but binde me not, and let me goe.
Must I, who came to travaile thorow you,
Grow your fixt subject, because you are true ?

Venus heard me sigh this song,
And by Loves sweetest Part, Variety, she swore,
She heard not this till now ; and that it should be so no more.
She went, examin'd, and return'd ere long,
And said, alas, Some two or three
Poore Heretiques in love there bee,
Which thinke to stablish dangerous constancie.
But I have told them, since you will be true,
You shall be true to them, who are false to you.

Critical Appreciation. All the poems in the collection called "Songs and Sonets" are characteristic expressions of Donne's wit. This wit may be roughly defined as the development in logical form of general propositions or statements, often paradoxical, preposterous or hyperbolical, and the reinforcement and illustration of them by means of ingenious analogies.

In these poems Donne displays his wit, maintaining the most outrageous paradoxes, mocking at the Petrarchan adoration and Platonic idealism of Spenser and the Sonneteers of the time, flouting conventions which he felt had lasted too long.

In the poem *The Indifferent*, Donne probably had in mind the Fourth Elegy of the Second Book by Ovid. (In that Elegy Ovid declares that his love is not kindled by any particular type of woman. Whatever qualities a woman may have are so many different reasons for loving her). But, while Donne reproduces the witty depravity, the entirely unidealized and unspiritualized sensuality, of Ovid, he introduces, in his attack on constancy and defence of inconstancy, an element of scholastic argument and paradox which is quite foreign to Ovid.

The poem exalts inconstancy as a virtue and condemns constancy as a great vice. The poet can love any type of woman provided she is not true or constant. He gives a catalogue of different kinds of women and says that they are all acceptable to him as mistresses if they are not faithful in love. He can love a fair woman and a brown woman ; a rich woman who yields easily to a lover, and a needy woman who is compelled by her poverty to yield ; a woman who likes solitude and a woman who loves the theatre ; a rustic woman and a townswoman ; a woman who weeps all the time and a woman who never weeps :

> I can love her, and her, and you and you,
> I can love any *so she be not true*.

If women wish to be true in love on the assumption that men are true, let them shed this illusion. Men are not true. Let therefore women too enjoy variety in love as men do. The poet would like to enjoy the love of twenty women, and he would urge his beloved to enjoy the love of twenty men. The poet refuses to be true to his beloved just because she is true to him. Let her follow his example.

The climax comes in the last stanza when Venus, after a rapid survey of the lovers in this world, announces that there are just two or three persons who wish to establish the dangerous practice of constancy and that all other lovers are already following the poet's example of inconstancy. Those two or three persons will be punished for their reluctance to fall in line. They will discover, to their chagrin and dismay, that those to whom they are true have proved false to them.

As has already been suggested, the poem is based on a paradox. While an overwhelming majority of people insist on constancy in love, the poet insists on inconstancy. But, of course, the poet is, in actual fact, mocking at inconstancy. The poem is an excellent example of Donne's wit and irony. The very catalogue of different kinds of women in the first stanza is witty, and the wit continues in the rest of the poem.

It is an example of a non-serious love-poem, written in jest, though we shall not forget that Donne himself did, in his early youth, actually conform to the ideal of inconstancy which he humorously preaches. (Donne had numerous love-affairs in his youth and had no scruples in this matter). We have to treat this poem as a satire on lovers.

The conventional or colloquial style of the poem is note-worthy. The poet seems to be *talking* to his beloved, not "poetizing".

Conceits in the poem. 1. The previous generation of women (your mothers) was inconstant in love. (This is an obvious exaggeration).

2. Men are not true in love : *"Oh we are not*, be not you". (This too is an exaggerated view).

3. Venus personally comes and declares that constancy should be no more. She also brings the information that "some two or three poor heretics in love there be, which think to establish dangerous constancy".

All the conceits in this poem result from a grossly exaggerated description of the nature of love in this world : it is fickleness which has been exaggerated and magnified.

NOTES

Stanza I. *I can love both faire and browne*—I can love a woman of a fair complexion, and I can also love a woman of a brown complexion.

Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betraies—I can love a woman who, because of her wealth and prosperity, is prone to soften towards every lover, and I can love a woman who is forced by her poverty to enter into a sexual relationship with anyone.

Her who loves......and plaies—I can love a woman who loves solitude, and I can love a woman who is fond of going to the theatre and watching plays and masques.

Her whom the country form'd, and whom the town—I can love a woman who was born and brought up in the country, and I can love a woman who was born and brought up in a town.

Her who believes, and her who tries—I can love a woman who believes the assurances and promises of a lover, and I can love a woman who puts a lover to test before showing any favour to him (*tries*—puts to test).

Her who still weepes......and never cries—I can love a woman whose eyes are moist all the time because she constantly weeps. And I can love a woman who never weeps, and whose eyes are dry like a cork. (*still weeps*—weeps all the time ; weeps constantly ; *spungie*—spongy ; wet like a sponge ; moist or drenched with moisture).

I can love her, and her, and you, and you......she be not true—I can love this woman, and that woman. I can love the one who is in my presence now, and another who is near me. I can love any and every woman, **as long as she is not faithful in love**.

Note. The significance of the title of the poem, *The Indifferent*, must now be clear. This lover is not discriminating or fastidious, because he can love any kind of woman. His only condition is that a woman should not be true or faithful in love. This is an obvious paradox. Normally a man demands loyalty or constancy from a woman whom he loves. But this lover demands inconstancy. Donne's poetry abounds in paradoxes, just as it abounds in conceits.

Stanza II. *Will no other vice content you ?*—Addressing a woman, the poet asks if she must insist on constancy in love and if she cannot be pleased with some other vice. Here is another paradox, though it is an elaboration of the one pointed out above. The poet looks upon constancy as a vice or a serious fault, and he condemns the woman for demanding constancy from a lover. Why can she not demand some other, less serious, vice from the lover ?

Will it not serve your turn to do as did your mothers ?—Will it not serve your purpose to follow the example set by your mothers ? (The implication is that the mothers of the present generation of women were inconstant in love and took many lovers. Let the present generation of women follow that example. This is another example of the poet's mockery of women).

Or have you all old vices spent, and now would finde out others ? Or, have you women exhausted all your old vices such as constancy and loyalty, and would you now therefore look for other vices ? As has been pointed out, constancy in love is being regarded as a vice. The mothers were not guilty of this vice. Why should the daughters not continue to follow the example set by the mothers ?

Or doth a feare, that men are true, torment you ? Or, do you feel tormented by the fearful thought that men are faithful as lovers ? (It is possible that women are thinking of becoming faithful in love because they have the fear that men are faithful. If so, they need not have this fear, as the poet points out in the next line).

Oh we are not, be not you so—We, men, are not true or constant in love. So you, women, also should follow our example, and not bother to be true or faithful in love.

Let mee, and doe you, twenty know—Let me make love to a large number of women, and you should also make love to a large number of men. Let both men and women enjoy variety in love.

Rob mee, but binde me not, and let me goe—Addressing the woman, the poet says that he would not mind being robbed of his money by her, but that he would mind it very much if she wants him to stick to her only He asks her to let him go after he has made love to her. After leaving her, he would like to go to some other woman.

Must I who came......because you are true ?—The poet tells the woman that he has had to face much trouble for her sake. Just because she is faithful in love, does it mean that he should also permanently attach himself to her ? Even if the woman is true in love, the poet would not like to stay with her all the time (*travaile*—trouble ; distress ; painful labour. *thorow*—"through" *fixt subject*—permanent devotee ; constant lover)

Stanza III. *Venus heard me sigh this song*—Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, heard me sing this song in a mournful voice.

And by Loves sweetest part......it should be so no more. Venus took an oath by the sweetest part of Love, namely, variety. (Variety in love here is regarded as the most enjoyable aspect of love's experience. Venus, therefore, swears by this variety because variety in love is something very precious or valuable). Venus swore that she had not heard about constancy in love till I sang this song, that is, my poem. Therefore, as soon as she heard it, she declared that constancy would not be allowed any longer. In other words, Venus said that there would be no more constancy among lovers.

She went, examin'd......dangerous constancie—Venus went and carried out a survey. Soon she returned and said that her scrutiny revealed that there were a few poor rebels who wanted to establish the dangerous evil of constancy in love. (The idea is that, according to Venus, there are only some two or three persons in the world who believe in constancy, and that the overwhelming majority of people in the world are inconstant) (***heretiques***—those who go against orthodox beliefs ; those who rebel against orthodox practices. Here the established practice is inconstancy in love, and there are only a few who wish to violate the established custom and preach constancy. Heretics are always regarded as dangerous, to begin with. The heretics in love preach a dangerous doctrine, namely, constancy).

But I have told them......false to you—Venus has, however, given a warning to those who preach constancy. She has told them that, if they persist in their course, they will be punished. Their punishment will be that those, to whom they are true or constant, will prove false or disloyal to them. In other words, those lovers (men or women) who are themselves true in their love will find, to their dismay, that their beloveds are false to them.

24. Lovers Infinitenesse

If yet I have not all thy love,
Deare, I shall never have it all,
I cannot breathe one other sigh, to move,
Nor can intreat one other teare to fall,
And all my treasure, which should purchase thee,
Sighs, teares, and oathes, and letters I have spent.
Yet no more can be due to mee,
Than at the bargaine made was ment,
If then thy gift of love were partiall,
That some to mee, some should to others fall,
Deare, I shall never have Thee All.

Or if then thou gavest mee all,
All was but All, which thou hadst then ;
But if in thy heart, since, there be or shall,
New love created bee, by other men,
Which have their stocks intire, and can in teares,
In sighs, in oathes, and letters outbid mee,
This new love may beget new feares,
For this love was not vowed by thee.
And yet it was, thy gift being generall,
The ground, thy heart is mine, what ever shall
Grow there, deare, I should have it all.

Yet I would not have all yet,
Hee that hath all can have no more,
And since my love doth every day admit
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store ;
Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it :
Loves riddles are that though thy heart depart,
It stayes at home, and thou with losing savest it :
But wee will have a way more liberall,
Than changing hearts, to joyne them, so wee shall
Be one, and one anothers All.

Critical Appreciation. The poem *Lovers' Infiniteness* well illustrates some of the characteristics of Donne's poetry. Here is the meaning of the poem, stanza by stanza :

Stanza I. If I have not won all your love, I cannot hope to win it now. I can do no more to win it. You certainly have all my love ! I realize my only claim is on the love you meant to give me—you may not have intended it all for me.

Stanza II. But, supposing you did intend it all for me, "all" was only what you were capable of giving then. Love, once it is roused and exercised, must increase ; and—torturing thought—through my love for you, other men may seek you and with their unexhausted charms, fare better. I admit you are under no obligation to give this new love to me—but wait a moment, I am wrong—I have a claim to it, for you would not be able to love at all apart from me ; so I do claim all your love !

Stanza III. But no, I do not want it all—I shall exhaust it ! though we can both grow in love and so exchange more. But surely it is not a matter of 'exchange'. What a paradox, what a riddle, it all is, but I am sure we must stop thinking of giving, which is a finite idea, and so, exhaustible ; we do not give all, we become all, and, joined together, our love will be infinite.

"The poem is an argument, controlled by "if", "or", "yet", or "but". It is much more than a clever game with bargains and contracts, although it can be that for those who will not look for more. The poet penetrates to the little explored deeper levels of personality and, especially in lines 13, and 27 following, lights up its potentialities. More aware at the beginning of her possibilities than of his own, he astutely demonstrates in the third stanza the falsity inherent in ever saying one has done all one can, by confessing that he also can grow in love ; lines 25 following contradict lines 3-6.

Certainly *Lovers' Infiniteness* is not by or far a sensual person, for whom line 23 would have no appeal. Its theme is the growth of love, and after looking at "all" from every angle, the poet discovers that it has itself grown in meaning during the argument, to mean much more, in the last line, than the first. It is one example among many of an emotional idea invested with thought which makes it attractive with new meaning. (This application of thought to feeling enabled him as a preacher to hold the attention as he considered the great themes of religion, so that he was never just sentimental or intellectual but, in the fusion of thought and feeling, truly passionate).

The conclusion of this poem presents an idea which runs through Donne's poetry and preaching. Instead of the exchange of hearts, considered as something which each can give to the other, each enters upon the fullness of love by union ; they no longer have each other but they are each other.

Conceits in this poem. 1. Even after a woman has given all her love to a man, other men may be able to arouse in her additional love which she may then give to others.

2. The additional love thus created in the woman may justly be claimed by the original lover because the additional love has been created in her heart, and the heart already belongs to the original lover.

3. The two hearts (of the man and the woman) can be united into one, so that the two lovers become just one individual.

NOTES

Stanza I. *If yet I have not......have it all* (lines 1-2). If I have not been able to win all your love so far, then I can never have all of it.

I cannot breathe......I have spent (lines 3—6). I have exhausted all my resources in trying to win your love in its entirety. I have exhausted my sighs, my tears, my oaths, my letter-writing, etc. I am in no position now to breathe even one more sigh, or to shed even one more tear, or to write even one more letter to you in order to move your heart. If, in spite of all this, I have not yet got your whole love, there is no chance of my getting it in the future.

Yet no more can be......I shall never have Thee All (lines 7—11). Nor can I claim any more of your love. After all, you could give me as much of your love as had been bargained for. You could not do more than required by the contract. If you gave only a part of your love to me, it means that the rest of your love was to be given to others. That being so, I shall never be able to have your entire love, and I shall never become your sole possessor.

Stanza II. *Or if then thou......thou hadst then* (lines 12-13). But, if you gave me all your love at the beginning, it amounted to just as much as you had at that time. Even if you gave me all your love, it could not exceed what you had at your disposal.

But if in thy heart......was not vowed by thee (lines 14-19). But, since then, a new development may have taken place. Other men may have approached you and, with their fresh stock of tears, sighs, oaths, and letters, may have moved your heart and created in you an additional capacity for love. These men had naturally larger resources (in terms of tears, sighs, oaths, and letters) than I because I had already exhausted my resources. The additional love which these men have aroused in you gives me cause for fresh apprehension. You had originally promised to give me all your love, and you gave it all to me. But you had not promised to give me any additional love which might be created in you, because the thought of this additional love had not crossed our minds. My apprehension therefore is that this additional love will be given by you to other men.

And yet it was......I should have it all (lines 20—22). And yet I have no reason for any apprehension. You were, in fact, committed to give me all your love—the original love which already existed in your heart and any additional love which might subsequently be aroused in your heart. And my claim to this additional love is as *follows* : You gave me your heart which may be regarded as the ground in which love grows. If your heart is mine, anything that grows there should also be mine. Accordingly, I am entitled even to that love which took rise in your heart after you had given me the love which originally existed there. (The heart may be compared to a piece of land. The love in the heart is like a crop which grows there. As the heart belongs to the poet, he can justly claim all the crops that grow there, even if the subsequent crops grow there as a result of the efforts of other men).

Stanza III. *Yet I would not have all yet...... new rewards in store* (lines 23—26). Yet I would not like to get all your love. If I get all of it, then I cannot expect any more from you. But my love for you keeps growing every day, and there are no limits to its growth. That being so, any increase in my love should be rewarded with some more love from you. (In other words, your love for me should keep growing as mine does for you).

Thou canst not every day......never gavest it (lines 27-28). You cannot give me your heart every day. If you think you can do so, it means that you never gave me your heart at all. (If the heart has been given once, how can it be given every day ? And if it can be given every day, it means that it is never really given at all).

Loves riddles are......savest it (lines 29-30). It is a riddle of love that, though you may give away your heart, it yet continues to remain with you. Thus you lose your heart (by giving it away to somebody) and yet you retain it (because it never really leaves you). (When somebody says he has given his heart to his beloved, he only means it in a metaphorical sense. Actually the heart stays where it was).

But wee will have a way......one anothers All (lines 31—33). But we shall follow a mere liberal course than exchanging hearts. We shall join or unite our two hearts and make them one. Then you and I shall become one, and we shall be everything for each other. I shall become *all* for you, and you will become *all* for me.

25. The Legacie

When I dyed last, and, Deare, I dye
  As often as from thee I goe,
  Though it be but an houre agoe,
And Lovers houres be full eternity,
I can remember yet, that I
  Something did say, and something did bestow ;
Though I be dead, which sent mee, I should be
Mine owne executor and Legacie.

I heard mee say, Tell her anon,
  That my selfe, (that is you, not I,)
  Did kill me, and when I felt mee dye,
I bid mee send my heart, when I was gone,
But I alas could there finde none,

When I had ripp'd me, and search'd where
hearts did lye ;
It kill'd mee againe that I who still was true,
In life, in my last Will should cozen you.

Yet I found something like a heart,
But colours it, and corners had
It was not good, it was not bad,
It was intire to none, and few had part.
As good as could be made by art

It seem'd ; and therefore for our losses sad,
I meant to send this heart in stead of mine,
But oh, no man could hold it, for twas thine.

Critical Appreciation. In *The Legacy*, the love-relationship is analysed by a metaphysical use of a single word-object. In *A Valediction : of Weeping*, this object was tears ; in this poem it is a heart. The title, and much of the poem's imagery, depend on the familiar notion that absence from the beloved is death. Before he left her last time ("When I died last"), the poet is sure he promised her, by way of a legacy, some gift. If he were really dead, he could not remember it. Thus a split-personality trick is introduced, whereby the essential pretence involved in the "absence=death" equation is both admitted and ignored at the same time, so that the poet can write :

Though I be dead, which sent me, I should be
Mine own executor and legacy.

The poet has survived himself into a kind of death-in-life of separation, where

I heard me say, tell her anon
That my self, (that is you, not I)
Did kill me......

(She was all of his real self, so that by leaving him alone she was responsible for his death). In this state of death-in-life he recalls that : "I bid me send my heart, when I was gone". But he could not find his heart, and was forced to lie to her by leaving what he did not have. The implication is that she already had his heart, whole and entire and completely in her possession. The imagery of death is sustained, and the brilliant, violent line in which he describes (still the dual personality) Donne alive and searching for Donne, a corpse, for his heart reads thus : "When I had ripped me, and searched where hearts did lie." In the last verse, there is a remarkable change of tone, a deepening, a refocussing, which is technically and spiritually magnificent. The schism (or the split) is healed. The ironically macabre "situation" created in the first two verses has made its point, and can be allowed to fade gently into the single sorrow of the wonderful finale. This last verse is vibrant with a still ironic regret, yet in no sense can it not be called "serious" in spite of the conceit of the foregoing stanzas which it develops. Her heart is given wholly to no man and what he found was a part of it only : *that* small part which he *did* play in her life.

In this poem, then, Donne contrasts a man's silly romanticism with a woman's practical promiscuity. The woman can so divide her heart that she keeps it still, yet many men are tormented by the fear of only possessing a scrap (a "corner") of her affection which sticks inside them and makes them dream they possess what they can never possess. The emotional beauty of that slow, regular closing couplet is important because it warns us against being led into dismissing what is being said as "unreal" or "insincere".

The argument of the poem may thus be summed up : "When I last died (that is to say, when I was last absent from you), I appointed myself my own executor and legacy. I told myself to send you my heart, but when I looked for it I could not find it. I found indeed something like a heart, which I meant to send instead, but no one could hold it, for it was yours".

Conceits in this poem. 1. Every time the poet parts from his beloved, he dies. Every separation means a death for him.

2. The poet becomes his own executor and legacy. (How is that possible except in a poem by Donne ?)

3. The poet wishes to send his heart, after his death, to his beloved.

4. On cutting open his breast he finds his heart missing. The shock of this means yet another death for him.

5. Eventually he finds something which resembles a heart. It turns out to be the beloved's heart many pieces of which had been given away to various lovers. This is therefore not her entire heart, but the residue.

NOTES

Stanza I. ***When I dyed last***—When I last separated from you. The poet here equates his separation from his beloved with his death. In other words, when he is away from his beloved, he is no better than dead.

and, Deare, I dye/As often as from thee I goe—And, my dear, every time I leave you, I die. Every separation from you is like a death for me.

Though it be but an houre agoe,......full eternity (lines 3-4)—If I leave you, it is as if I had died. If an hour later I separate from you again, it is another death for me. But an hour is not exactly an hour in the case of a lover. If the lovers have to wait for each other just for one hour, it is like eternity, because time seems to stretch itself to infinity in the case of lovers waiting for each other.

I can remember yet......executor and legacie (lines 5—8)—Before I died last time (that is, before I separated from you last time), I remember that I said something about leaving something for you as a gift. I also remember that I wanted to be my own executor and my own legacy. (*executor*—one who carries out the provisions of the will of a dead man. *legacie*—legacy ; money or gift or property that has been left by a dead man for some friend or relative). The poet says that he would implement his own will in accordance with which he was to bestow a gift upon his beloved. This is, of course, a paradox. How can a dead man execute his own will ?

Stanza II. *I heard mee say......when I was gone* (lines 9—12) —When I was dying (that is, when I was leaving you), I remember saying that you should soon be informed that I was myself responsible for my death, though I should have said that you, not I, were responsible for it (by your cruelty towards me), Even if I was myself responsible, in effect you were responsible, because I think that your being includes mine, or that I have no entity separate from yours. I also remember instructing myself to send you my heart after my death.

But I alas could......where hearts did lye (lines 13-14)—But I am sorry to say that, when I had cut my breast open and looked for my heart at the place where a heart is supposed to be, I did not find my heart there.

It kill'd mee againe......should cozen you (lines 15-16)—When I found my heart missing, it was like a second death for me. I was shocked by the discovery that I, who always loved you truly during my lifetime, should cheat you after dying by not carrying out my promise to send you my heart. This shock killed me for the second time. (*cozen*—cheat).

Stanza III. *Yet I found something......and few had part* (lines 17—20). Yet I did find something resembling a heart. This something had its colours, and it had some corners. It could not be called a good kind of heart, but it was not a bad kind of heart either. It was not a heart in its entirety. It seemed that parts of it had been given away to certain persons.

As good as could be made by art/It seem'd—It seemed as good a heart as could have been made by the exercise of skill. (The idea seems to be that it was not a natural heart but the product of human artifice).

And therefore for our losses sad,......in stead of mine (lines 22-23). And so, to compensate ourselves for our painful losses, I made up my mind to send you this heart instead of mine, which was missing. "Losses sad" would refer to the missing heart of the poet. As a compensation, the poet would send this other heart to his beloved.

But oh, no man could hold it, for twas thine (line 24)—But I am sorry to say that no man could hold this heart because it proved to be your heart. (The preceding lines of this stanza can be explained only in the light of this final line. It was the beloved's heart which the poet found in his breast after a good deal of search. But it was not a whole heart. Pieces from this heart had been given by this woman to several lovers That is why this heart was *not* good and was not bad. That is why it had corners. That is why "it was entire to none, and few had part." After having distributed parts of it among other lovers, she had given the residue to the poet who had then found it in his breast after a good deal of search. In short, the woman did not love anyone truly ; she had been distributing her favours among several lovers ; nobody could have her entire love. (As for the poet's heart, it was missing from his breast because he had already given it to this woman during his lifetime). The ingenuity of the argument is noteworthy.

26. The Message

Send home my long strayed eyes to mee,
Which (Oh) too long have dwelt on thee ;
Yet since there they have learn'd such ill,
Such forc'd fashions,
And false passions,
That they be
Made by thee
Fit for no good sight, keep them still

Send home my harmlesse heart again,
Which no unworthy thought could staine ;
But if it be taught by thine
To make jestings
Of protestings,
And crosse both
Word and oath,
Keep it, for then 'tis none of mine.

Yet send me back my heart and eyes
That I may know, and see thy lyes,
And may laugh and joy, when thou
Art in anguish
And dost languish
For some one
That will none,
Or prove as false as thou art now.

Critical Appreciation. This poem is based on an obvious conceit. The poet has given to his beloved not only his heart but also his eyes (which wanted to stay with the beloved in order to enjoy the pleasure of looking at her all the time). The lover would now like to get back his eyes because they have spent too long a time in the beloved's company. Then he changes his mind on realising that, in the company of his beloved, his eyes must have learnt "forced fashions" and "false passions" and are therefore of not much use to him. He asks her, therefore, to keep his eyes with her. Next he asks her to send back his heart which he had given her But in this case also he changes his mind. His heart was perfectly innocent and pure when he gave it to her. But in her company his heart has perhaps learnt to scoff at expressions and declarations of love, and has perhaps learnt also to break promises and oaths. He therefore asks her to keep his heart too because it is no longer his heart (having been tainted by the evil in her). The poet then gives another turn to his argument. He asks his beloved to send back his eyes and his heart to him, after all. He would examine his eyes and his heart and get some idea of how false and faithless she is. In other words, by seeing his infected eyes and heart, he will know the extent of evil which exists in her nature. After he has come to know how evil she is, he will laugh and rejoice at her distress and grief when she falls in love with somebody who does not respond to her love or who proves faithless to her as she is now to the poet.

The Message belongs to that group of poems in which Donne adopts a cynical attitude towards women and love. The poet's own love is here depicted as strong and firm, but the beloved's love is depicted as false and inconstant. There is, obviously, a note of melancholy running through the poem. It is worth noting that there is not much exaggeration or extravagance in this poem. The idea here is very simple, and so is the expression of the idea. There is nothing fantastic in the poem and there is not the least touch of obscurity.

Conceits in the poem. The poet imagines that his eyes as well as his heart left him in order to stay with his beloved, (and he feels that they have stayed there too long). He asks his beloved to return his eyes and heart to him but he then changes his mind and asks her to continue to keep them. Eventually he again changes his mind and asks her to send back his eyes and heart to him. Thus the poet speaks of the eyes and the heart as if these can be given or taken back at will. However, there is nothing *fantastic* about this conceit. It is common for lovers to speak of giving or losing their hearts.

NOTES

Stanza I. *Send home......dwelt on thee* (lines 1-2)—Send back to me my eyes which have wandered away from me and stayed too long to look at you.

Yet since there......keep them still (lines 3-8)—Yet I would like you to keep my eyes still. Having stayed with you for a long time, they have learned much evil. They have learnt artificiality and pretence. They have learnt to observe false shows and to wear an expression of feelings which do not really exist in the heart. In this state they may no longer be fit to see things properly. I would therefore not like to have my eyes back.

Stanzs II. *Send home my harmlesse heart......could staine* (lines 9-10)—Send back to me my innocent heart which never entertained any unworthy thought. No evil thought had ever touched my heart or flawed its goodness.

But if it be taught......none of mine (lines 11-16)—But it is possible that my heart, having dwelt in the company of your heart, has learnt to mock at declarations of strong love, and to break promises and pledges. Keep it, then, with you because, in that condition, it is no longer my heart. (If my heart has been influenced by your faithless heart, then I would not like to have my heart back, and you can keep it with you). *To make jestings*—to mock at ; to jeer at ; to treat lightly. *Of protestings*—of emphatic declarations of love ; a lover's forceful pleading of his love. *crosse*—cross ; violate ; break.

Stanza III. *Yet send me back......and see thy lyes* (lines 17-18—In spite of what I have said above, you may send back my eyes and my heart to me, so that I may scrutinise them and form some idea of your falsehoods and lies by which they have been influenced.

And may laugh and joy ......as thou art now (lines 19-24)—I shall be able to laugh and rejoice when you fall in love with somebody and suffer the distress of disappointment because that somebody will not care for you or, if he cares for you, will soon prove faithless just as you have proved faithless to me. (*anguish*—grief ; sorrow ; pain. *languish*—decline on account of sorrow or grief ; become weaker and weaker because of some anxiety weighing on the mind).

27. The Funerall

Who ever comes to shroud me, do not harme
Nor question much
That subtile wreath of haire, which crowns my arme ;
The mystery, the signe you must not touch,
For'tis my outward Soule,
Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,
Will leave this to controule,
And keep these limbes, her provinces, from dissolution.

For if the sinewie thread my braine lets fall
Through every part,
Can tye those parts, and make mee one of all ;
These haires which upward grew, and strength and art
Have from a better braine,
Can better do'it ; except she meant that I
By this should know my pain,
As prisoners then are manacled, when they'are condemn'd
to die.

What ere shee meant by'it, bury it with me,
For since I am
Loves martyr, it might breed idolatrie,
If into others hands these Reliques came ;
As'twas humility
To afford to it all that a Soule can doe,
So, 'tis some bravery,
That since you would save none of mee, I bury some of
you.

Critical Appreciation. *The Funeral* is full of conceits : in fact it is one long conceit woven round a wreath of the beloved's

hair. This is what the poet says : "This subtle wreath of hair about my arm is my outward soul. It should be buried along with my dead body because it has the power to save my body from disintegration and decay. If the hair-like nerves that descend from my brain can keep all parts and organs of my body united, this wreath of hair, growing upwards on a far better head than mine, will keep my body intact still more effectively, unless she gave me this wreath of hair to prove my enslavement to her, just as fetters on a man show that he is a prisoner condemned to death. Whatever she meant, this wreath of hair should be buried with me, for I am love's martyr and, if this wreath of hair falls into other hands, it is likely to be worshipped as a relic, thus causing idolatry. I showed my humility in attributing to this wreath of hair the power of a soul. Let me now show my pride in burying a part of her who would save no part of me."

It is certainly an ingenious and witty poem. Although the argument is rather involved and not easily understood, it develops in a strictly logical manner. Nor can we doubt that the poem enshrines a noble and tender sentiment. The intellectual quality of the poem is most marked but we here have an example of what has been called "emotional intellectuality".

The poem reminds us of *The Relic* in which also the subject is a wreath of hair or, as the poet puts it in that poem "a bracelet of bright hair" around his arm. The women in both these poems are capable only of Platonic love and want their lovers to be content with a wreath of hair. In both poems the woman's love is of a spiritual kind, but while in *The Relic* the lover is happy and contented in *The Funeral* the lover, starved of physical or sexual satisfaction, is dying of love, and therefore calls himself "Love's martyr".

Conceits in this poem. 1. A wreath of the beloved's hair is regarded by the poet as a symbol of his soul. This wreath of hair is capable of protecting the different parts of his dead body from disintegration and putrefaction. It is therefore the "Viceroy" of his soul. (This is evidently a fantastic idea).

2. She may have given him this wreath of hair to signify his enslavement to her. It is compared to the fetters which are put on a prisoner who is condemned to die. (Another far-fetched notion).

3. If this wreath of hair falls into other hands, it might be treated by lovers as a relic and might therefore "breed idolatry" (This is fantastic, too).

NOTES

Stanza I. *Who ever comes to shroud......my arme* (lines 1—3) Whoever comes to wrap my dead body in a winding-sheet, should not raise any objections to my wearing my beloved's strand of hair round my arm. That curl of hers has a peculiar virtue and it should be allowed to remain tied to my arm. (*to shroud*—to wrap in a shroud. "Shroud" means the winding-sheet which encloses a dead body. *subtile*—subtle ; mysterious ; possessing a quality the meaning of which cannot be understood by everybody).

For 'tis my outward soule (line 5)—because that wreath of **hair** symbolizes my soul , it is an outward or visible symbol of my soul , it represents my soul.

Viceroy to that (line 6)—That wreath of hair is a deputy to my soul ; in the absence of my soul, that wreath of hair will perform the functions of my soul.

which then to heaven being gone......from dissolution (lines 6—8)—My soul will fly to heaven at my death. But that wreath of hair will protect the limbs of my body from disintegration just as, during my lifetime, my soul kept the limbs of my body intact. In this way that wreath of hair will act as a viceroy or agent of my soul and exercise control over my limbs in the grave just as a viceroy appointed by a king controls the king's distant provinces and governs them on the king's behalf. (*these limbes, her Provinces*—The bodily limbs are here compared to the provinces or territories governed by a viceroy. In this case the beloved's wreath of hair is the viceroy to keep the limbs together when the poet's body lies in the grave. *dissolution*—disintegration ; putrefaction).

Stanza II. *The sinewie thread my braine lets fall* (line 9)—the hair-like nerves which descend from my brain.

And make mee one of all (line 11)—and can unite my various limbs and organs into one body.

These haires which......Can better do'it (lines 12—14). My beloved's hairs, growing upwards (not descending as was the case with my nerves), possess much strength and effectiveness as coming from a superior head (superior to mine). Those hairs can therefore keep my body more effectively united.

except she meant......to die (lines 14—16)—unless it was her intention that, by giving me a wreath of her hair, she should make me suffer the pain of being enslaved to her, just as prisoners suffer the pain of being put in fetters before they are condemned to death. (The wreath of hair is now compared to manacles or fetters which a prisoner has to wear. The poet, by wearing the wreath of hair round his arm, has become a prisoner or slave of the beloved. Perhaps she gave the wreath of hair to him to establish his enslavement to her, like the manacles on a condemned prisoner).

Stanza III. *Loves martyr* (line 19) one who dies for the sake of, or in the service of, love. (We are to imagine that the poet is dying of love)

breed—produce ; bring about or bring forth. *idolatrie*—worship. *these Reliques*—these hairs of the beloved. A relic is some part of a holy person's body or belongings kept after his death as an object of worship and reverence.

Whate'er shee meant......these Reliques came (lines 17—20)—Whatever may have been my beloved's intention, this wreath of hair must be buried with my body. If it is not buried with me, it might fall into the hands of other people who will begin to worship and reverse it as a relic because I am dying as a martyr to love.

As 'twas humility......I bury some of you (lines 21-24)—I was humble enough to attribute to this wreath of hair all the powers and functions of my soul. So now it is a matter of pride for me to bury a part of my beloved who does not care for me and who is pleased to let me die. (*bravery*—this word is used here to mean "pride". *since you would have none of me*—since you, my beloved, are not prepared to love me or to have anything to do with me. The poet has previously spoken of his beloved in the third person : "she". But now he addressess her directly as "you". *some of you*—a wreath of her hair which is a part of her.

28. The Blossome

Little think'st thou, poore flower,
Whom I have watch'd sixe or seaven dayes,
And seene thy birth, and seene what every houre
Gave to thy growth, thee to this height to raise,
And now dost laugh and triumph on this bough,
Little think'st thou
That it will freeze anon, and that I shall
To morrow finde thee falne, or not at all.

Little think'st thou poore heart
That labour'st yet to nestle thee,
And think'st by hovering here to get a part
In a forbidden or forbidding tree,
And hop'st her stiffenesse by long siege to bow :
Little think'st thou,
That thou to morrow, ere that Sunne doth wake,
Must with this Sunne, and mee a journey take.

But thou which lov'st to bee
Subtile to plague thy selfe, wilt say,
Alas, if you must goe, what's that to mee ?
Here lyes my businesse, and here I will stay :
You goe to friends, whose love and meanes present
Various content
To your eyes, eares, and tongue, and every part.
If then your body goe, what need you a heart ?

Well then, stay here ; but know,
When thou hast stayd and done thy most ;
A naked thinking heart. that makes no show,
Is to a woman, but a kinde of Ghost ;

How shall shee know my heart ; or having none,
Know thee for one ?
Practise may make her know some other part,
But take my word, shee doth not know a heart.

Meet mee at London, then,
Twenty dayes hence, and thou shalt see
Mee fresher, and more fat, by being with men,
Than if I had staid still with her and thee.
For Gods sake, if you can, be you so too :
I would give you
There, to another friend, whom we shall finde
As glad to have my body, as my minde.

Critical Appreciation. Throughout his life Donne was an assiduous student of himself, indulging in self-analysis and self-criticism with remarkable detachment. There is much to be said for associating him with psychology and not metaphysics. His love-poems are essentially studies of his varied reactions to his experiences, self-centred monologues which tell us nothing of the charms and attractions of the beloved. He can stand outside himself. He sees himself associating emotion and thought, rebelling against unreal conventions, and awakening to his relationship with others. He impregnates his poetry with the moods and changing arguments which show him being driven by the force of one extreme to its opposite; as he stresses the claims of the body, then of the mind and soul, the very form of his poetry caught up in this tension and capturing the struggle between the spirit and the flesh, in moments of paradoxical insight when thought and feeling, body and soul are fused.

The Blossom is a poem of much interest in this connection. The poet has been staying in the country for a week, and now the time has come to return home, to London. Life has been very pleasant in the company of a gracious lady, his hostess, to whom, indirectly, he addresses a subtly complimentary poem on leaving. His admiration and attachment are admitted, and controlled, so that finally the poet vindicates and exalts the unromantic, familiar, ordinary home life to which he is returning. He plays lightly with Petrarchan and Platonic love, the former incapable of anything enduring and the latter incapable of anything. The argument leaves no doubt as to the conclusion. Yet the two sentiments are so nicely balanced that he reveals himself in his true nature as a self-torturer, whose heart (that is, his mind or soul) is subjected to rigorous examination.

The first and second stanzas are linked by the words "Little think'st thou". The poet addresses first the blossom, and then his own heart, in comparison. Just as the frost kills the spring blossom, so she, chillingly unresponsive, checks his affection for her, and she will even be fast asleep when he begins his journey at sun-rise to-morrow.

With the third stanza the mood changes suddenly, as these romantic notions are considered in the light of reason which now stages a disputation between the heart, which stays in the country, and the body, which travels to London. The heart speaks first, declaring its sufficiency, apart from the body :

> Here lies my business, and here I will stay
> You go to friends, whose love and means present
> Various content
> To your eyes, ears, and tongue, and every part.
> If then your body go, what need you a heart ?

In the fourth stanza the body replies : "Please yourself. But you will find that you cannot get far by yourself" The body may be able to prosper without the heart, but the heart can get nowhere without the body.

> A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,
> Is to a woman but a kind of ghost.

The debate ends in the last stanza, with an emphatic assertion of the place of the body in life. The references to the precise place ("London") and time ("twenty days hence"), and his contacts with men in the world of the daily routine are deliberate intrusions of realism. Heart and body will be united as he returns "to another friend" (his wife, perhaps), and to an affection in which his whole nature is co-ordinated. Thus the conclusion of poem is the same in as *The Dream* : we sleep, to wake.

This taking of the self to pieces, this analysis of the component parts of the personality, can be illustrated from his other poems also.

Conceits in this poem. 1. According to the poet's fancy, the heart can be separated from the body. The heart can stay with the lady while the poet and his body go back to London.

2. The lady herself has no heart. For this reason she cannot recognize anybody else's heart. This too is a fancy.

NOTES

Stanza I. *Little think'st thou......or not at all*—In the opening stanza the poet addresses a flower. He has watched the flower for six or seven days ; he has witnessed its growth from the very outset. The flower is now in the prime of its youth and beauty. It seems to be laughing with joy and feeling jubilant at its own loveliness. But the flower does not realize that it will soon fade away or fall to the ground and crumble in the dust. (What the poet has said about the flower is equally applicable to the lady about whom the poem is written. The lady, too, is now in the prime of her life and she too will soon begin to fade and decline).

Stanza II. *poore heart*—After addressing the "poor flower", the poet turns to his own "poor heart". The flower was "poor" because it was doomed to die soon. The heart is "poor" because it has not been able to win the lady's love. It is also "poor" because it does not realize the mistake it is making in staying on at the lady's country house even after the poet's departure for London.

That labour'st yet to nestle thee—The poet's heart has, like a bird, been trying to build a nest in the tree of the lady's love (but that tree did not permit the nest. Perhaps the lady found it impossible to give the permission because she already belonged to another man. That is the significance of the word "forbidden" in the next line). The poet's heart strives to "nestle" to the lady's bosom. It tries to get close to the lady's breast in order to win her love.

And think'st by hovering......forbidding tree—The poet's heart believes that by hovering around the lady it might be able to win the love of the lady who has so far adopted a forbidding attitude. (She has so far been totally unresponsive, and has not offered the least encouragement to the poet's heart).

And hop'st her stiffnesse by long siege to bow—The poet's heart (mistakenly) thinks that by its persistence it will be able to wear down the lady's resistance and that ultimately she will yield.

Little think'st thou,......and mee a journey take—The poet's heart does not realize that next morning it has to go on a journey with the poet at sun-rise even before the lady wakes up. (*that Sun*—that lady ; the word "sun" has been used metaphorically for the lady because she too possesses a dazzling brightness and is the source of warmth to men. *this Sun*—in the literal sense, the sun that rises in the morning).

Stanza III. *Subtile*—subtle ; ingenious ; acute ; mysterious.

to plague thyselfe—to torment yourself.

What's that to mee—The poet's departure does not concern the poet's heart.

Here lies my businesse, and here I will stay—Let the poet go ; the heart will stay on here because it can feel happy only by staying in the lady's company.

You go to friends......and every part—Let the poet go to his friends whose affection and resources provide satisfaction to every part of his body—eyes, ears, tongue, etc. ("Eyes" are happy to see friends. "Ears" are pleased to listen to the voices of friends. "Tongue" finds pleasure in talking to friends).

But thou which lov'st......what need you a heart ? (lines 9—16)—The poet's heart has a tendency to torment itself. It likes to stay on at the lady's residence. Let the poet-lover go back to London, but his heart cannot leave the lady. The poet will go to his friends who with their affection and with their means will endeavour to please him in every possible way. Let then the poet depart bodily but leave his heart behind. After all, the poet will not need his heart in London where he is going because he will have all sources of bodily satisfaction there.

Stanza IV. *A naked thinking heart......a kind of Ghost*—Let the heart then stay here at the lady's country residence. But the heart will be naked (that is, without the poet's body to cover it). The heart, without the body, will be able to think and feel, no doubt; but it will not be able to show itself : it will be invisible like a ghost. A naked thinking heart will therefore be just like a ghost to the lady. Unless a woman feels the warmth of a body close to hers, how can she appreciate a lover's heart only ?

How shall shee......for one ? (lines 29-30)—The lady will not recognize the heart as being the poet's heart (because she could have recognized it only if the poet's body had been there too). In fact, she will not even know that it is a heart because, having no heart herself, she does not know what a heart is like. (The lady's having no heart means that she is heartless, *i.e.*, cruel).

Practise may make her......a heart (lines 31-32)—She might, by experience, learn how to know or identify other parts of a man's body, but she can never identify or recognize a heart. (*But take my word*—a form of asseveration : But I assure you).

Note. In this stanza the poet says in effect : A heart without a body is useless to a woman. Besides, this particular woman does not even know what a heart is, because she herself is without a heart.

Stanza V. *Meet mee at London, then*—The poet is going back to London from where he had come here for a brief stay with the lady at her country seat.

Twenty dayes hence—Let the poet's heart meet the poet at London after twenty days from now.

And thou shalt see......and thee—The heart will find that the poet has, after twenty days of the companionship of his male friends, grown fresher and fatter than he would have, in case he had stayed with his heart at the lady's residence.

For Gods sake......so too—The poet appeals to his heart to try to become fresher and fatter during these days, if possible. (The heart is to be offered to another woman, as we are told in the next line. Let the heart therefore become fresher and healthier so as to be in a fit condition to be given away to another woman, more responsive than the lady who did not soften towards the poet.

I would give you......as my minde—In London the poet would give his (refreshed) heart to another woman who will be glad to receive not only his heart and his mind but also his body.

Note. The poem is thus a plea for the demands of the body which should be thought to be as important as the mind or the heart. In love, sexual satisfication is as necessary as spiritual or intellectual intercourse.

29. The Dampe

When I am dead, and Doctors know not why,
And my friends curiositie
Will have me cut up to survay each part,
When they shall finde your Picture in my heart,
You thinke a sodaine dampe of love
Will through all their senses move,
And worke on them as mee, and so preferre
Your murder, to the name of Massacre.

Poore victories ! But if you dare be brave,
And pleasure in your conquest have,
First kill th'enormous Gyant, your *Disdaine*,
And let th'enchantresse *Honor*, next be slaine,
And like a Goth and Vandall rize,
Deface Records, and Histories
Of your owne arts and triumphs over men,
And without such advantage kill me then.

For I could muster up as well as you
My Gyants, and my Witches too,
Which are vast *Constancy*, and *Secretnesse*,
But these I neyther looke for, nor professe ;
Kill mee as Woman, let mee die
As a meere man ; doe you but try
Your passive valor, and you shall finde then,
Naked you'have odds enough of any man.

Critical Appreciation. *The Damp* is one of Donne's cleverer love poems. The word "damp" means a state in which a human being has lost his senses or his awareness of his surroundings. In other words, it means a fainting fit caused by some shock. We have a fine conceit in the opening stanza where we are told that the doctors, on dissecting the dead lover's body, will find the beloved's picture in his heart and will thus come to know the reason of his death. But, at the very moment that the doctors discover the cause of the lover's death, they themselves will be stunned by the beauty of the woman as seen in the picture and they will drop down dead too. Her beauty will thus have killed not one man but a number of them.

In the second stanza we are told about the weapons which the woman wields in order to kill her lovers. One weapon is Disdain, an "enormous giant". In other words, the woman is contemptuous towards her lovers and they naturally feel wounded by her contempt. Another weapon is Honour, which is an "enchantress" or witch. In the name of her honour, this woman refuses to meet her lovers or to encourage them, or to have anything to do with them. This sternness on her part, this callous indifference to their suffering, kills them. The poet would want her not to use these weapons, nor to make use of the technique by which she has been winning victories ever men's hearts in the past, but to kill him without such aids.

In the third stanza, the poet claims that he too has a "giant" and a "witch" to support him and to fight for him. His giant is "Constancy", and his witch is "Secrecy" in love. Thus against the woman's Disdain and Honour, he sets up his Constancy and Secrecy in love. But he does not want a confrontation. Let the woman kill him as a woman only, with her female graces and her loveliness; and he will die as a mere man without offering any pleas to be spared. Even without her Disdain and her Honour, she is more than a match for any man and can win a victory over any man's heart. The pun on the word "naked" in the last line should not be missed, because that lends a spicy touch to the poem.

The passion of the poem cannot be doubted, though we cannot be sure whether this passion is sincere, or merely the pretext for writing a clever poem.

Conceits in the poem. 1. When the lover's body is dissected, the doctors will find the beloved's picture in his heart.

2. The doctors, on seeing the woman's picture, will be so struck by her beauty that they will collapse and die. (Could there be greater extravagance or exaggeration ?)

3. The woman's Disdain is an enormous giant, and her Honour is an enchantress. The man's Constancy and Secrecy are his giant and his witch.

4. This woman can kill any man with her passive valour, without the aid of her Disdain and her Honour : "Naked you have odds enough of any man."

NOTES

Dampe—damp ; a trance ; stupor , a state in which a man is oblivious of his surroundings.

Stanza I. *When I am dead......in my heart* (lines 1—4)—When I die, and doctors are unable to tell the reason why I have died, the curiosity of my friends will force them to have my dead body dissected for investigation. When the doctors, in the course of their dissection and investigation, examine my heart they will find your picture there. Then they will know that I died because of my love for you.

You think......of massacre (lines 5—8)—On seeing your picture, even the doctors will feel stunned by your beauty and charm. The effect of your beauty on them will be to deprive them of their senses. Your picture will work on their minds and overwhelm them, just as it worked on my mind. Thus the doctors will die too. And your achievement will not be just a murder of one lover (that is, myself) but of a whole lot of them (that is, of the doctors as well). It will no longer be a murder but a regular massacre. (*preferre*—promote. *massacre*—wholesale slaughter. *and so preferre......massacre*. In this way, the word murder will not be used, but a bigger word "massacre" will be used to describe the havoc which your beauty has wrought).

Stanza II. *Poore victories......next be slaine* (lines 9—12)—Your conquests of your lovers will not deserve any praise. However, if you win your victories, not through your contempt for your lovers or through your professed sense of honour, it would be a bigger achievement. If you have the necessary courage, and if you want to draw real pleasure from your victories, you should first kill your disdain which has the dimensions of a huge giant, and afterwards kill what you call your sense of honour which seems to have magic powers. (Disdain and Honour are personified. Disdain is regarded as an enormous giant, and Honour is regarded as an enchantress or witch).

And like a Goth......kill me then (lines 13—16)—You should also carry out some destructive operations and behave like the Goths or Vandals who, being barbarians, destroyed whatever they came across in the course of their onward march. You should destroy all records and chronicles containing an account of the manner in which you won your victories over men. (Having thus killed your Disdain and your Honour, and having destroyed records of the technique by which you conquered the hearts of men), you may then proceed to kill me without the advantage which you now have over me. (The advantage consists in her having a giant, Disdain, and an enchantress, Honour, on her side. The advantage also consists in her having a complete record of the technique by which she can win victories over men's hearts).

Stanza III. *For I could muster up......nor profese* (lines 17—20)—If you have a giant and an enchantress with whose help you kill men, I have a giant and a witch also to help me in love, and I could summon my giant and my witch if need be. My giant is Constancy in love and my witch is Secrecy in love. However, I do not expect you to have these qualities ; nor do I wish to boast of possessing these qualities myself.

Kill mee as a woman......of any man (lines 21—24)—Kill me with your womanliness, without employing such weapons as Disdain and Honour, and I shall die as a mere man without trying to protect myself with my weapons of Constancy and Secrecy. Just try to kill me with your passive bravery (that is, without the use of the giant and the enchantress already mentioned), and you will find that you can defeat any man unaided. (*Naked you have odds enough of any man.* The word "naked" here is not used in a literal sense, though there is definitely a pun upon this word here. The word is used to mean "without any aid", or "without the help of your Disdain and your Honour". "Odds enough of any man" means : you are more than a match for any man. If we take the word "naked" in its literal sense, the line will mean that the woman, in her naked state or condition, can overpower any man's resistance. That would be a mischievous interpretation though it could not have been absent from Donne's mind).

30. The Prohibition

Take heed of loving mee
At least remember, I forbade it thee ;
Not that I shall repaire my'unthrifty wast,
Of Breath and Blood, upon thy sighes, and teares,
By being to thee then what to me thou wast :
But, so great Joy, our life at once outweares,
Then, lest thy love, by my death, frustrate bee,
If thou love mee, take heed of loving mee.

Take heed of hating mee,
Or too much triumph in the Victorie.
Not that I shall be mine owne officer,
And hate with hate againe retaliate ;
But thou wilt lose the stile of conquerour,
If I, thy conquest, perish by thy hate.
Then, lest my being nothing lessen thee,
If thou hate mee, take heed of hating mee.

Yet, love and hate mee too,
So, these extreames shall neithers office doe ;
Love mee, that I may die the gentler way ;
Hate mee, because thy love is too great for mee ;
Or let these two, themselves, not me decay ;
So shall I, live, thy Stage, not triumph bee ;
Lest thou thy love and hate and mee undoe,
To let mee live, O love and hate mee too.

Critical Appreciation. *The Prohibition* contains several paradoxes typical of Donne's poetic genius. The poet asks his beloved not to love him too much. (This is a paradox because normally a lover wants his beloved to love him as much as possible). The excess of joy, which her love would fill him with, might kill him and so frustrate her love. But at the same time, and this is another paradox, he asks her not to hate him. Her hating him would mean that she has an exaggerated feeling of triumph because of her victory over him. Not that he would retaliate by hating her too. But he might die from her hatred and, in that case, she would lose the title of conqueror. (A true conquest means only defeating the opponent and not killing him). If the poet dies because of her hatred, her stature would to some extent be diminished because she will no longer be able to call herself a conqueror. Then comes another paradox. He would like her to love him and at the same time to hate him. If she both loves and hates him, niether of these two extremes will have its full effect of killing him. Extreme love and extreme hatred would cancel out each other. In that case he can remain alive, and this will be a great benefit to her because, alive, he will be like a stage on which her victory is daily enacted. She should thus spare his life by loving and hating him at the same time.

The poem shows some of Donne's ingenuity in arguing a case. The argument is not straightforward ; as in many other poems, it undergoes various turns and twists. It would not be wrong to call this poem a specimen of Donne's intellectual gymnastics. The argument is rather involved, and imposes considerable strain upon the reader's mind. Many of Donne's love-poems are characterised by the quality of "emotional intellectuality", but *The Prohibition* is characterised only by "intellectuality", the emotion being kept only in the background. The poet's passion for the woman can, of course, be imagined, but it does not find a specific expression in the poem. The poet treats his passion as a ground on which to build up a structure of reasoning and argument. This is certainly not one of Donne's best poetic attempts.

Conceits in the poem. 1. Excessive joy, caused by the fulfilment of love, overwhelms and kills a human being. This is one conceit. Another which follows immediately afterwards is that, in view of this possibility, the beloved should not love the poet.

2. The beloved is asked not to hate the poet because her hatred may kill him also and she may thereby lose the title of a conqueror over him.

3. The poet would like his beloved both to love him and hate him so that these two feelings can cancel out each other, and he can survive. (The argument here is rather odd. If love and hatred cancel out each other, what would the beloved's resultant attitude towards the poet be ? It is possible for a human being to adopt a dual attitude towards another. But the cancellation of both the passions would leave nothing behind except a kind of blankness in the beloved's mind).

NOTES

Stanza I. *Take heed of loving mee* (line 1)—Beware of loving me. Do not love me.

At least remember, I forbade it thee (line 2)—Even if you do not stop loving me, you should at least remember that I warned you not to love me.

Not that I shall repaire......what to me thou wast (lines 3—5)—It does not mean that, if you love me, I shall take a revenge on you by becoming indifferent to you just as you were indifferent to me. I have been sighing a lot and I have been shedding profuse tears of disappointment at your hard-heartedness towards me. I have been extravagant in wasting my breath and my blood (my sighs and my tears). But that does not mean that I shall compensate myself for this loss by making you sigh and shed tears at my coldness towards you. I shall certainly not adopt an attitude of coldness towards you. (In other words, he only warns her not to love him, but if she does love him he will not assume an attitude of coldness towards her in order to make her sigh and shed tears).

But so great Joy our life at once outweares (line 6)—My reason in asking you not to love me is that, if you do love me, I shall be filled with an excessive joy which may overwhelm me and kill me by its very excess. Too much joy proves fatal to human beings.

Then, lest thy love......of loving mee (lines 7-8)—If, therefore, you love me, I may die. My death will be a sore disappointment to you because your love will then come to nothing. I therefore warn you not to love me.

Stanza II. ***Take heed of hating mee......in the Victorie*** (lines 9-10)—Beware of hating me or of feeling too triumphant over your conquest of me.

Not that I shall......retaliate (lines 11-12)—If you hate me, I shall not take the law in my own hands. I shall not hit you back by returning your hatred with my hatred.

But thou wilt lose......perish by thy hate (lines 13-14)—But, by hating me and feeling triumphant in your victory over me, you may kill me. And if I die, you will lose the title of a conqueror over me. You can call yourself a conqueror only if you let me live. But, if you hate me, I may die, and then you will not be entitled to call yourself a conqueror. (The word "conqueror" here is used to mean a person who wins a contest by defeating his opponent, but not by killing him).

Then, lest my being......of hating mee (lines 15-16)—If you kill me by your hatred and an excessive sense of victory over me, you will lose the title of a conqueror and, in this way, be reduced in stature because of me. I do not want that I should be responsible for any diminishing of your importance. Therefore, the best course for you will be not to hate me.

Stanza III. *Yet, love and hate mee too......neithers office doe* (lines 17-18)—I want you both to love and hate me at the same time. If you do so, the extremes of love and hatred will have no effect on me, and neither of these two attitudes on your part will kill me. The two extremes will neutralize each other.

Love mee, that I may die the gentler way......too great for mee (lines 19-20)—I want you to love me so that if I have to die I may die a gentle death, a death caused by your excessive kindness. At the same time, I want you to hate me because your excessive love will kill me and I do not want to die. By hating me at the same time as you love me, you will at least spare my life. (The paradoxical manner of arguing the case is obvious here).

Or let these two, themselves, not me decay (line 21)—Or let your extreme love and extreme hatred destroy themselves by their mutual opposition. In that case, neither your love nor your hatred will kill me. (*decay*—bring about decay or decline ; kill ; destroy).

So shall I live, thy Stage, not triumph bee (line 22)—In this way if I live on, I shall be like a stage on which your victory is daily enacted. I shall not then be a cause for you to feel triumphant over my death, because your triumph as a conqueror over my death will be short-lived. By letting me remain alive, you can win a daily victory over me.

Lest that thy love......and hate mee too (lines 23-24)—In order that you should not destroy your love, your hate, and me as well, you should love and hate me at the same time, and so preserve my life.

31

As due by many titles I resigne
My selfe to thee, O God, first I was made
By thee, and for thee, and when I was decay'd
Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine,
I am thy sonne, made with thy selfe to shine,
Thy servant, whose paines thou hast still repaid,
Thy sheepe, thine Image, and till I betray'd
My selfe, a temple of thy Spirit divine ;
Why doth the devill then usurpe in mee ?
Why doth he steale, nay ravish that's thy right ?
Except thou rise and for thine owne worke fight,
Oh I shall soone despaire, when I doe see
That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not chuse me.
And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee.

Critical Appreciation. This is Sonnet II of Donne's "Holy Sonnets". It shows the poet's intense desire to devote himself wholeheartedly to God, but at the same time it shows the painful struggle that goes on in his mind between this desire and the temptation that sin offers.

The poet is keenly conscious of his indebtedness to God. God made him and, when he was corrupted by sin, he was bought by God through Christ's sacrifice. The poet believes himself to be God's son, God's servant, God's sheep, God's image, a temple for God's Divine Spirit. Why does the Devil then exercise such a strong hold on him ? Why does the Devil take by force what actually belongs to God ? The poet wants God to use all his power to reclaim him. It is a pity that God loves all mankind and yet does nothing to get the poet back from the Devil's clutches, while the Devil hates the poet and yet does not wish to lose him.

It is clear that the poet does not in any way try to cover up his sinfulness or to put up a pretence of piety. He frankly confesses that he is in the grip of the Devil. But though he tries to get out of the Devil's grip, he fails in his effort and so needs God's active help. He is on the verge of despair because the Devil's hold on him is very tight.

The poet's religious fervour is noteworthy. In calling himself God's son, servant, sheep, etc. he shows his complete surrender to God and his complete humility. His appeal to God for rescue is characterized by perfect sincerity. Nor does he disguise his human

frailty in being unable to shake off the Devil's grip which holds him **like a vice**

The poem is written in **a** simple, plain style. There is no metaphysical conceit here, unless it be the use of the word "ravish" to convey the idea of the Devil's taking forcible possession of the poet. There is no obscurity of any kind in the poem.

NOTES

As due by many titles I ***resigne/My*** *selfe to thee, O God* (lines 1-2)—I resign myself to you, O God, because I belong to you by virtue of many legal rights or entitlements. I am yours, O God, and I surrender myself to you and place myself at your disposal.

first I was ***made/By*** *thee, and for thee*—I was originally made by you and I was meant to serve you.

and when I was decayed/Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine—And when I was corrupted by sin, you purchased me by the sacrifice of your blood, and in buying me you only took possession of what originally belonged to you. ("Thy blood" here refers to Christ's blood which was shed when he sacrificed himself for the redemption of mankind).

I am thy sonne......to shine (line 5)—I am your son whom you created that I might shine along with you. (There is a pun upon the word "son" here. The "sun" shines, thus serving as a revelation of God. The poet is the "son" of God and he may also be regarded as another sun. The poet here refers to the exalted status with which God originally blessed man).

Thy servant, whose paines thou hast still repaid (line 6)—I am your servant, and you have always rewarded me for any labour which I may have undergone in your service.

thy sheepe, thine Image—I am a sheep, a member of the flock of which you are the shepherd. I am your image because you made man in your own image. (The Bible tells us that God made man in His own image).

and till I betray'd/My selfe, a temple of thy Spirit divine—And, till I went astray and became a sinner, I was a temple in which your divine spirit resided. In other words, I was holy and sacred in your eyes till I took to a life of sin.

Why doth the devile then usurpe in mee ? (lines 8-9)—Why does the devil then make bold to overpower me or exercise control over me ?

Why doth he......thy right ?—Why does the devil steal me from you, when I belong to you ? Nay, the devil is not just stealing me ; he is taking possession of me by force. (*to ravish*—to take forcible possession of).

Except thou rise......to lose mee (lines 11—14)—Unless you rise and put up a fight against the Devil in order to take possession of me, I shall soon give up all hope. It is depressing for me to see that you are not making any effort to possess me when I find that you have a real love for human beings. The irony of my situation is that the Devil hates me and yet is unwilling to relax his hold upon me. You, on the other hand, love me just as you love all other human beings, and yet you make no effort to take possession of me.

32

Oh my blacke Soule ! now thou art summoned
By sicknesse, deaths herald, and champion ;
Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled,
Or like a thiefe, which till deaths doome be read,
Wisheth himselfe delivered from prison ;
But damn'd and hal'd to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned ;
Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke ;
But who shall give thee that grace to beginne ?
Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,
And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne ;
Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red soules to white.

Critical Appreciation. This is Sonnet IV in the "Holy Sonnets". It seems to have been written in a state of illness. The poet considers his soul "black" because of a consciousness of the sins that he has committed. His sickness is, he says, a "herald" of death. In other words, death has "summoned" his soul through its herald which is sickness. He then compares his soul to a man who, having fled from his country and gone to another land. commits an act of treason to his motherland, and then feels afraid of returning for fear of punishment. This is, indeed, a very appropriate simile. The Soul is unwilling to return to heaven because of a fear of the punishment it will receive for its sins on this earth. This is followed by another simile. The soul is compared to a thief who would rather stay on in a prison than face the sentence of death. The Soul too would, in order to avoid punishment for its sins, like to continue as a prisoner in the body rather than go back to heaven. However, it is possible for the Soul to achieve God's grace through repentance. Let the Soul blush with shame and let it experience a genuine regret for its sins. By doing so, the Soul may get God's forgiveness. Christ's blood has the power to wash away all the taint of sin from the Soul. Christ is the Redeemer and, through His mercy, the Soul can attain its goal.

It is a deeply religious poem. There can be no doubt about the sincerity of the poet in repenting of his sins and in seeking God's mercy. This poem shows Donne as a true believer in God, in the immortality of the soul, in heaven, in the power of Christ to redeem all sinners, and in the efficacy of repentance as a means of salvation. Here we see Donne as a true Christian, and we are greatly impressed by his reverential attitude towards God and Christ. What a far cry from the Donne of "Songs and Sonets" to the "Holy Sonnets"! Donne seems to have been cleansed and purified of all his sins because he places himself completely at God's mercy.

The ideas in the poem are perfectly simple, and they are expressed in language which too is simple. There is nothing that is incomprehensible in this poem. There are no metaphysical flights of fancy, and there is nothing involved in the argument or the expression.

NOTES

My blacke Soule (line 1)—My Soul which is black with sin.

Deaths herald, and champion (line 2)—Sickness is regarded as a messenger of death. It is also regarded as a champion of death because, it is through his sickness, that death will take away the poet's Soul.

Thou art like a pilgrim......to whence hee is fled (lines 3-4)—You, my Soul, are like a traveller who goes to a foreign land and there commits an act of treason to his own country. Such a traveller would not dare to return to his native land from where he had fled, because he knows that he will be punished for his treason. You, my Soul, have also committed many sins against God after coming into this world, and now you would not like to go back to heaven, which is your real home, because you are afraid of punishment for your sins.

Or like a thiefe......might be imprisoned (lines 5—8)—Or, you may be compared to a thief who wishes to be released from the prison but who changes his mind when he is told that he has been sentenced to death and that the sentence will now be carried out. This thief will now wish that he may be kept as a prisoner in the jail indefinitely so that he may be saved from execution. You, my Soul, would have liked to go back to heaven but, because you know that you will be punished there, you would like to stay on in this world where you are leading the life of a prisoner.

Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke (line 9)—Yet, O my Soul, you should not feel afraid. If you repent of your sins, you may still be forgiven by God. (The word "grace" means divine mercy or charity, or forgiveness).

But who shall give thee that grace to beginne ? (line 10)—But how are you going to get the grace of God ? How are you going to make a beginning in that direction ?

Oh make thy selfe......as thou art with sinne (lines 11-12)—Put on funeral clothes, which are black in colour, as a mark of your repentance. Put on a black apparel as a mark of holy repentance. And make yourself red with shame, as you are now red with sin. Let your black garb indicate repentance, and let your red colour indicate your shame. (Both "red" and "black" colours are treated as symbolic of sin. "Red" also indicates shame).

Or wash thee in Christs blood......to white (lines 13-14)—Or wash yourself in the blood of Christ. Christ's own blood is red too (in the literal sense), but it has the power to change the redness of repentant souls into white which is the colour of innocence. In other words, Christ's blood can redeem you and restore you to your innocence.

33

This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint
My pilgrimages last mile ; and my race
Idly, yet quickly runne, hath this last pace,
My spans last inch, my minutes last point,
And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoynt
My body, and soule, and I shall sleepe a space,
But my'ever-waking part shall see that face,
Whose feare already shakes my every joynt :
Then, as my soule, to'heaven her first seate, takes flight,
And earth-borne body, in the earth shall dwell,
So, fall my sinnes, that all may have their right,
To where they'are bred, and would presse me, to hell.
Impute me righteous, thus purg'd of evill,
For thus I leave the world, the flesh, and devill.

Critical Appreciation. The subject of this sonnet (Number VI in "Holy Sonnets") is death and the poet's fear of punishment for his sins. The poet feels that his time to die has come. He will now live only a short while more. And he conveys this idea by means of several metaphors : "my play's last scene", "my pilgrimage's last mile", "my race hath this last pace", "my span's last inch", "my minute's latest point". All these phrases, coming in quick succession serve to heighten the poet's feeling that he is now on the brink of a precipice.

Death, "gluttonous death" (*i.e.*, death which hungrily swallows human lives), will separate the poet's soul from his body. The body will sleep in the grave, while the soul which is his "ever-waking part" will soar to heaven to face God. And here comes the climax. The fear of God, who will punish him for his sins, is terrible ; this fear shakes every joint of his. But his sins belongs to this world ; they belong to his *body* or *flesh* ; they were the work of the devil. And his soul will leave all these—"the world, the flesh the devil" —behind and return to its original abode, its "first seat". This thought gives comfort to the poet, and he is thus able to reconcile himself to his death.

This poem, like many of his other holy sonnets, shows Donne's reverence towards God, his belief in the immortality of the soul, and his fear of punishment for his sins. It is written in a devout mood,

and its religious piety is catching. As we read it, we too fall under the poet's spell and we begin to look inwards for a self-examination The poem has an elevating effect upon us.

The thoughts in the poem are simple and familiar. The language is simple too. Nor is the poem encumbered by theological learning or allusions.

NOTES

This is my playes last scene (line 1)—My life may be compared to a play which is enacted on the stage. This moment is the last scene of that play. (In other words, the time of my death has come).

*here **heavens appoint......last mile*** (lines 1-2)—My life may be compared to a race which I have been running. Now I am running to complete the last mile of my life's journey. (*Pilgrimage*—the journey of life).

and my race......last point (lines 2—4)—I have completed my race too quickly. But the race has been meaningless, without purpose. (I have achieved nothing worth while in my life). Now the last step has to be taken before the duration of my life ends. The very last stage of my short stay here on eath has now been reached. (***span***—short distance. ***my minutes last point***—my brief stay's last point ; the very last stage of my brief journey).

And gluttonous death......a space (lines 5-6)—And the greedy death which is ready to devour me will at once separate my soul from my body and take possession of the body which will then sleep for some time in the grave. (*gluttonous death*—death whose hunger is never satisfied).

But my ever waking......every joynt (lines 7-8)—But my soul which is always awake will stand before God and see His face. The fear of being confronted with God makes every joint in my body tremble and quake.

Then, as my soule,......shall dwell (lines 9-10)—After the death of my body, my soul will soar to heaven which was its original abode. (*her*—the soul's. ***first** seate*—original abode). But my body, which had an earthly origin, will remain on earth (*i.e.*, in the grave).

So, fall** my sinnes, that......**to hell (lines 11-12)—Let my sins be taken note of in hell. My sins belonged to my flesh or my body. Justice should be done to me and only my body should be punished for my sins, not my soul.

Impute *me righteous......**and devill*** (lines 13-14)—My soule will have been purged of all evil when it leaves the body. My soul will have been purified by being rid of the body. That righteous or noble soul will then leave this world, this body, and the devil which had much power over me as long as the soul was imprisoned in the body

34

At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
From death, you numberlesse infinities
Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe,
But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,
For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,
When wee are there ; here on this lowly ground,
Teach mee how to repent ; for that's as good
As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

Critical Appreciation. This is Sonnet VII in the sequence "Holy Sonnets". The poet here anticipates the Doomsday or the Judgment Day. According to a popular Christian belief, the angels of God will blow their trumpets on the Doomsday and, in response to that call, the living will die and the dead will wake up. The Doomsday will mark the end of the world. Accordingly, the poet here imagines the blowing of trumpets by the angels and the waking up of numberless souls who will return to their bodies. The poet sums up in three lines the various causes that lead to the death of human beings. These causes are floods, war, famine, old age, fevers, the tyranny of kings and dictators, suicide committed by those who see no hope in life, punishment awarded by law, accident, etc., and the poet also mentions the fire that will rage on the Doomsday and destroy everything.

Having described the scene on the Doomsday and the various causes that lead to the deaths of human beings, the poet turns to himself. He is afraid of the punishment that would be meted out to him after death. He would therefore like to seek God's forgiveness while he is still here on this earth, because it will be too late to seek that forgiveness after death. He can attain God's forgiveness only if he genuinely repents of his sins. He therefore entreats God to teach him how to repent, because even repentance is not easy.

The octave of this sonnet is remarkable for its imagery. The imagery is supernatural in the first four lines, and terrestrial or earthly in the next four lines. But both the terrestrial and the extra-terrestrial imagery are very vivid. The sester contains the poet's realisation of his sins and his ardent desire to repent of them so that God may grant him pardon.

Like other sonnets in this sequence, this poem shows Donne's deeply religious nature, and his firm belief in God and the immortality of the human soul. The poem has a psychological value in so far as it makes us realise that even repentance is not easy and even that can come to a human being only through the grace of God When we read these holy sonnets, we are struck by the contrast between Donne the rake and the writer of naughty love-poems on one hand, and Donne the divine, and the author of spiritually elevating poems on the other.

NOTES

At the round earths imagin'd corners (line 1)—The earth is here regarded as both round and flat. It can have corners only if it is supposed to be flat. We have here a mixture of the old view that the earth was flat and the new discovery that the earth is round. The idea of the earth's corners is derived from the Bible : "And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four wings of the earth."

blow/Your trumpets (lines 1-2)—The trumpets will be blown by God's angels on the Doomsday.

and arise, arise/From death, you numberless infinities......go (lines 2—4)—Numberless souls will rise and return to their bodies which lie in graves situated in various places. (The bodies will, of course, exist only as dust).

All whom the flood......hath slaine (lines 5—7)—Here a reference is made to the various causes which led to the deaths of the numberless people whose souls will rise on the Doomsday. Deaths were caused by floods, war, famine (dearth), old age, fevers (agues), the tyranny of kings, suicide caused by despair, punishments awarded by law, accidents, etc. These are the various causes of the destruction of human lives in this world. "The fire" referred to in line 5 means the fire that will end the world. That is why the future tense "shall overthrow" has been used.

and you whose eyes......deaths woe (lines 7-8)—And those others who are noble at heart and who will not experience the agony of death. These persons will have the privilege of seeing God in heaven.

But let them sleepe......when wee are there (lines 9—12)—The poet appeals to God to let the numberless souls sleep where they are and to postpone the Doomsday for some time so that, if his sins are too many, he may seek God's pardon when he is still here on the earth. After he is dead, it will be too late to seek God's forgiveness.

here on this......with Thy blood (lines 12—14)—The poet would like to learn to repent of his sins while he is still on this humble earth. Repentance will mean divine forgiveness. If he is able truly to repent of his sins, it will be as if God had confirmed his pardon with his blood (that is, the blood of Christ) In other words, true repentance can earn for the poet the general pardon that Christ's sacrifice offered to mankind.

35

If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree,
Whose fruit threw death on else immortall us,
If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
Cannot be damn'd ; Alas ; why should I bee ?
Why should intent or reason, borne in mee,
Make sinnes, else equall, in mee, more heinous ?
And mercy being easie, and glorious
To God, in his sterne wrath, why threatens hee ?
But who am I, that dare dispute with thee ?
O God, Oh ! of thine onely worthy blood,
And my teares, make a heavenly Lethean flood,
And drowne in it my sinnes blacke memorie.
That thou remember them, some claime as debt,
I thinke it mercy, if thou wilt forget.

Critical Appreciation. This is Number IX of the "Holy Sonnets". The first point to notice here is the poet's keen and painful awareness of the sins he has committed. It is this awareness of his sins which drove him to write this poem. But should his sins be punished with his soul's damnation ? that is the question he asks. There are certain minerals which are poisonous and prove fatal to living beings. There was that tree in Paradise the fruit of which had a fatal quality because it changed the immortal Adam and Eve into mortals. There are such creatures as goats whose lechery knows no bounds. Then there are serpents whose sting is fatal. If these cannot be damned, why should the poet be damned ? After all, his sins are no worse than the sins of all these ("poisonous minerals", "that tree", "lecherous goats", "serpents envious"). It is true that the poet has reason and volition but should he be punished for his sins just because he has reason and volition which trees, minerals, and animals do not have ? This thought not only perplexes but tortures the poet. The poet therefore prays to God for mercy. He will shed tears of repentance and his tears, mixing with Christ's blood, will wash away his memories of his sins. He appeals to God to take notice of his sins and to ignore or forget them.

The image of the poet's tears mingling with Christ's blood and taking the form of a "Lethean flood" is an obvious conceit.

The poem thus shows Donne's repentance of his sins and his earnest desire to be forgiven by God because mercy is "easy, and glorious to God". The sincerity of the poet cannot be doubted.

Even though the poet is in a somewhat defiant mood in the opening lines, that defiance is intended only to pave the way for a complete self-surrender by him to God. Like the other sonnets in this series, this one too has an ennobling and uplifting effect on the reader and tends to bring him closer to repentance and to God.

NOTES

that tree,/Whose fruit threw death on** else **immortall us (lines 1-2)—that tree the fruit of which imposed the punishment of death on human beings who would otherwise have been immortal. (The reference is to the tree the fruit of which Adam and Eve were forbidden to taste in Paradise. If they had obeyed God and not tasted the forbidden fruit, they would have remained immortals).

lecherous goats (line 3)—goats whose sexual appetite is insatiable.

serpents envious (line 3)—serpents which are hostile and antagonistic to man.

Why should intent or reason......more heinous ? (lines 5-6)—I, as a human being, have reason, and I have volition or will-power. Poisonous minerals, dangerous trees, etc., are without reason and without volition. But does that mean that my sins, though not in any way more serious than those of poisonous minerals and poisonous serpents, should be regarded by God as deserving greater punishment ? Should I be damned because of sins which are committed by other creatures of God also, when they receive no punishment ? (*else equall*—My sins which are otherwise equal to those committed by "poisonous minerals", "serpents envious", etc. *heinous*—serious and grave ; obnoxious).

And mercy being easie......why threatens hee (lines 7-8). God can easily show mercy to human beings. Mercy is glorious in the eyes of God, and it adds to God's glory also. Why should, then, God feel angry with me for my sins and why should He threaten me with dire punishment ?

Oh ! of thine only worthy blood......blacke memorie (lines 10-12) O God ! let a heavenly flood of my tears mixed with your sacred blood (that is, the blood of Christ) come and, like the waters of the river Lethe, drown my dark memories of my sins and make me totally forget those sins. (*Lethean*—pertaining to the river Lethe, the river of forgetfulness in the Hades. The river Lethe flows in the underworld. Whoever takes a dip in its waters forgets everything pertaining to his past).

That thou remember......will forget (lines 13-14)—Some may regard these sins as a debt which they want you to remember, O God. But I shall regard it as your mercy if you forget my sins (and make me forget them also).

36

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee ;
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,

And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better than thy stroake ; why swell'st thou then ?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.

Critical Appreciation. "Death be not proud" is Number X in the "Holy Sonnets". This poem is a most uncompromising proclamation of the ultimate defeat of death, though not until the last two lines is the Christian triumph specifically stated :

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more, Death, thou shalt die.

Paradoxically, death is first called the slave, not of the angel of resurrection, but of its own various modes or agents—Fate, chance, kings and desperate men ; while the idea of death being more pleasant than sleep because sleep is a mere counterpart of the real thing is really a metaphysical conceit.

The theme is simple—"O Death", the poet says in effect "where is your sting" ? The language is plain, the tone self-confident and full of energy. This is a lively poem about death, and a simple, calm denial "for thou art not so" establishes its feeling. We meet again the theme of death and sleep, of the picture and the reality. As sleep refreshes us, and delivers us from life, so does death. Death has no power in itself ; we die when it is our fate to do so, or by accident, or through the exercise of arbitrary power, or we are murdered. Death, so to speak, lives in bad and miserable company. Drugs are more efficient than death.

The whole trend of these images is to cut down death to size. The words "why swell'st thou then" ? repeat the theme of the first line "Death, be not proud...".

Here is a critic's comment on the technique of this poem : "In the concluding couplet only one word—'eternally'—is not a mono-syllable ; the meaning is hammered into us, an effect at least partly due to the effort we must make if we are to enunciate the words with their awkward combinations of consonants. 'One short sleep past' is not easy to say, and neither are the two th's in Dea*th*, *th*ou......This sacrifice of mellifluousness to energy caused some readers to condemn Donne's verse as harsh ; yet were it not for this crude colloquial force, the Latinate 'eternally' would not soar as serenely as it does ; nor would the elegiac cadence of 'Rest of their bones and soul's delivery' resound so nobly. It is this dramatic control over movement and tone, here exhibited within 'the sonnet's narrow plot of ground', which gives Donne's verse its range and power".

NOTES

for, thou art not so (line 2)—because you are neither mighty nor dreadful. (Death, says the poet, is not powerful and terrible as some people think it to be).

nor yet canst thou kill mee (line 4)—(Those whom you think you have killed do not really die). Nor yet do you have the power to end my life.

From rest and sleepe......must flow (lines 5-6)—When a man is resting or asleep, he is like a dead man. Rest and sleep are, therefore, images of death. If rest and sleep are a source of much pleasure, death must be a source of even greater pleasure, because rest and sleep are merely pictures of death. So why should anybody feel afraid of death ?

And soonest......soules deliverie (lines 7-8)—The sooner our best men die (in the physical sense), the sooner will their bodies rest in their graves, and the sooner will their souls be liberated (from the prison of the bodies).

Thou art slave......dwell (lines 9-10)—Death is not a free agent. It has no independent existence or authority of its own. In order to kill human beings, it has to seek help and assistance. It uses chance, accident, the power of kings and criminals, in order to kill. (A man may die by chance or in an accident, or through the order of a king, or through the murderous act of a criminal). Nor does death keep good company. It lives with poison, war, and sickness, all of which are its instruments for killing people.

And poppie, or charms......why swell'st thou then (lines 11-12)—Death brings a long sleep for human beings. But human beings can get an even more restful sleep by taking opium or by means of a magic spell. Why should death, then, feel proud of itself ("to swell" means to feel proud or self-important).

One short sleepe......thou shalt die (lines 13-14)—Death only means a brief suspension of our faculties. After a brief interval of unconsciousness, a man's soul becomes active and alert. And then this soul lives for ever. The soul conquers death. Thus it is death that dies, not the soul. (*eternally*—for ever).

37

Batter my heart, three person'd God ; for, you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend ;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, 'and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due,
Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue,
Yet dearely'I love you, and would be lov'd faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemie,
Divorce mee, 'untie, or breake that knot againe,
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.

Critical Appreciation. This is Sonnet XIV in the "Holy Sonnets". The poet here describes the agonizing struggle that is going on in his heart. He wishes his heart and mind to be purified of all sinfulness. But he cannot break away from his sinful life. Sin holds him in a tight grip. Only if God comes to his rescue and uses drastic methods, can he liberate himself from the clutches of sin.

This is how a critic comments on this poem : "In a series of brilliant paradoxes Donne begs God to take possession of his heart. None of his poems is more characteristic than this, with its nervous, jerky rhythm, intensity of feeling, and violent almost overstrained language".

The first paradox is found in the opening lines where the poet wants his heart to be "battered" in order to be purified. The poet wants to be "overthrown" in order to "rise and stand". He wants God to "break, blow, burn", him in order to "make him new". These lines also show the use of violent language. What the poet is really saying here is that he should be *coerced* into a righteous path because he cannot be corrected or reformed by means of indulgent or lenient methods. The second paradox is that the poet loves God and is yet "betrothed" to the God's enemy, the Devil. This means that the poet wishes to give up his sinfulness but his will-power is not strong enough for the purpose. The next paradox is that the poet cannot become free unless he is *enslaved* by God. How can freedom and slavery be reconciled ? The poet means that only by being made a prisoner by God can he be released from the Devil's clutches. And the final paradox is that, in order to become *chaste*, he should be *ravished* by God. Being ravished means losing one's chastity but the poet means that only if God takes *forcible possession* of him can he be rid of his sinfulness.

The various similes and metaphors used in the poem are noteworthy. The poet compares himself to a town which has been invaded and usurped by a conqueror and which, despite the best efforts of its people, cannot drive away the victors in order to be restored to its rightful king or ruler. Next, the poet's faculty of reason is described as God's "viceroy" *i.e.*, a functionary working on behalf of God. Then the word' "captiv'd", "betroth'd", "divorce", "enthrall" are all used in a metaphorical sense.

The poem shows the sincerity of the writer's feeling, and a real desire on his part to be reformed and to become a pious Christian. As such it stimulates the reader also to follow a virtuous path.

NOTES

Batter my heart (line 1)—Hit my heart with great force ; give severe blows to my heart.

three-person'd God—the Divine spirit which manifests itself in three persons—God, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The reference is to the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity means the union of three persons—God, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—in one God-head.

for, you/As yet......seeke to mend—Up to now you have been using mild ways to improve me. (*knock*—to administer gentle blows. *breathe*—to infuse a new spirit *shine*—to glisten ; to show lustre).

That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee (line 3)—The prose form will be : "(O God), overthrow me so that I may rise and stand". It is a paradoxical line. If the poet is to be overthrown, how can he rise and stand ? But he means that he needs a shock-treatment in order to be set right.

and bend/Your force......and make me new (lines 3-4)—Use all possible kinds of violence to make me a new man. (The poet wishes to be rid of his sinfulness. He therefore wants that God should use ruthless methods to turn him away from sin).

I, like an usurpt towne......to no end (lines 5-6)—I am like a town which has been occupied by force by the enemy while it belongs to its rightful ruler. I belong to you, O God, but I find myself in the hands of the Devil why has taken possession of me. I try hard to admit you into my heart but my efforts are of no avail.

Reason your viceroy in mee (line 7)—The faculty of reason has heen planted in human beings by you. I also have this faculty of reason which is your viceroy or deputy or agent to show me the right path.

mee should defend (line 7)—My faculty of reason should defend me against the Devil.

But is captiv'd (line 8)—But this faculty has become a prisoner in the hands of a devil (and proves helpless or faithless).

Yet dearely......your enemie (lines 9-10)—Yet my heart goes toward you, and I would gladly be loved by you. But I find myself engaged to (or bound to) your enemy, the Devil. (*faine*—gladly. *betroth'd*—engaged ; tied ; bound).

Divorce mee......againe (line 11)—Let the bond between the Devil and me be broken.

Take mee to you......be free (lines 12-13)—Take hold of me. Take me prisoner. Chain and enslave me. Unless you seize me, or take hold of me, I shall never be free.

Nor ever chast......ravish mee (line 14)—Nor can I become chaste or pure unless you take forcible possession of me. (The use of the words "chaste" and "ravish" makes this a paradoxical line. How can he become "chaste" if he is to be ravished ? The word "ravish" means to use force in order to perform sexual intercourse with a woman. The idea is that God must take forcible possession of him if he is to be cleansed of his sins).

38

Since she whome I loved, hath payd her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soule, early into heaven ravished,
Wholy in heavenly things my mind is sett.
Here the admyring her my mind did whett
To seeke thee God : so streames do shew the head,
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett.
But why should I begg more love, when as thou
Dost wooe my soule, for hers offring all thine :
And dost not only feare least I allow
My love to saints and Angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Least the World, fleshe, yea Devil putt thee out.

Critical Appreciation

Donne's tenderness for his wife. John Donne became the Dean of St. Paul's in 1621. His wife lived to see him become a priest, but four years before he became Dean she died (having borne him twelve children in the sixteen years of their married life). By worldly standards she had fared badly, her marriage having missed both periods of Donne's prosperity. But the marriage was a love match and from his letters it seems that he had a tender conscience concerning her welfare. *Sonnet XVII* (in "Holy Sonnets") commemorates her.

The argument. As in most of Donne's poems the argument here cannot be grasped entirely at the first reading. But this is what the poet seems to be saying : "My wife, whom I loved, is dead, snatched away, still young, to heaven, with the result that my own mind is wholly set on heavenly things. While she lived, my admiration for her led me to God, as a stream can be traced to its source. But though I have thus found God, and He has satisfied my thirst for Him, I yet crave thirstily the love of my wife". (Here, it may be pointed out, Donne goes back on his statement that his mind is wholly set on heavenly things). And he goes on : "But, after all, it is irrelevant to expect more love from my dead wife, when God is offering me *all* His love instead of her *broken* affection. And this love is comprehensive, for it claims to dispossess not only my holy love of my dead wife but my wicked love of the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

A self-centred sonnet. It is a self-centred sonnet. It is about the poet's own feelings and the state of his own soul and his hopes of what God is going to do for it. His dead wife, the nominal concern of the sonnet, is not in the least characterized ; she really has no existence (in spite of the elopement* and the twelve children in sixteen years), and she is the mere passive vehicle of her husband's pre-occupations. Along with the self-centred thought goes the entirely characteristic run of the verse : the drawn-out rhythms, the halting intensity. Like so much else of Donne, this sonnet is exclusively *his*, thoroughly individual. It gives the sense, almost the smell, of his unescapable personality, a personality that can grip, charm, stun, even overwhelm. Donne shows no social sense. He does not place his wife in any large human context.

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*It was a secret, runaway marriage.

Its logical structure. This sonnet has a logical structure. Donne begins by making a very decided statement :

Wholly in heavenly things my mind is set.

He then goes back on this decided statement by adding :

A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet.

This thirst is for a human, though holy, love. And he ends by showing that neither the decided statement nor the contradiction of it is to the point, because his wife's love for him has been superseded by the infinitely inclusive love of God. This kind of logical structure is quite characteristic of Donne and implies an unusual cast of mind : a reluctance to reach conclusions, a keener relish for the processes than for the issues of thought.

The close relation of the sense and the speaking voice. This is not one of Donne's greatest sonnets. The phrase "holy thirsty dropsy" strikes us as rather silly in sound, though some might justify it by saying that it mimicks the monotony of dripping water. Nevertheless Donne's great gift of appearing to think aloud shows itself here. One of his most common and his most characteristic means to this end is his ability to slow down his rhythms, which gives the air of his being in the very gestation of thought or of being impeded in it by the very strength of his emotions. The first three lines here succeed wonderfully, in their slow and halting gait, in rendering the stupefaction of intense grief, of the immense effort required to utter it. Only in the fourth line does he emerge into un-stupefied thought, and a clear rhythm. Also, Donne sets one division of his sonnet pointedly against the other. In the octave the verse is clotted, but with "But why should I beg more love......", it becomes thin, clear and exalted, showing a cleansed state of the spirit.

NOTES

Line 1. *She whome I loved*—his wife, Anne.

hath payd her last debt etc.—has died ; has given her body back to Nature.

Line 2. *and to hers*—and (paid her last debt) to her kinsfolk ; and rendered her last service to her relarives.

and my good is dead—and the poet's happiness has come to an end (as a result of his wife's death)

Line 3. *And her soule......ravished*—and her soul having been carried (by force) prematurely to heaven ; and her soul having been taken, before time was ripe, away from this world. (*ravish*—to carry off by force ; to take away from life or from sight).

Line 4. *Here......did whett, etc.*—The more he admired her the more he was led towards God.

Line 5. *So streames......head*—She was like a stream having her source in God. (Therefore by loving and admiring her he was impelled to turn to God, her source).

Line 8. *A holy......me yett*—And yet his holy desire for her has not been fully satisfied. And yet he feels a holy thirst or craving for her. *dropsy*—(lit.) a disease in which watery fluid collects in tissues of the body. The idea is that, even though God has fed the poet's thirst to overflowing, the poet feels a holy desire for his wife.

Line 13-14. *Thy tender jealousy etc.*—God is jealous lest the poet should turn again to worldly pleasures and to the Devil.

39. Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward

Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,
The intelligence that moves, devotion is,
And as the other Spheares, by being growne
Subject to forraigne motions, lose their owne,
And being by others hurried every day,
Scarce in a yeare their natural forme obey :
Pleasure or businesse, so, our Soules admit
For their first mover, and are whirld by it.
Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West
This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.
There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,
And by that setting endlesse day beget ;
But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
Sinne had eternally benighted all.
Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye ;
What a death were it then to see God dye ?
It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,
It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke.
Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
And tune all spheares at once, peirc'd with those holes ?
Could I behold that endlesse height which is
Zenith to us, and to'our Antipodes,
Humbled below us ? or that blood which is
The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
Make durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne
By God, for his apparell, rag'd, and torne ?
If on these things I durst not looke, durst I

Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus
Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us ?
Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
They'are present yet unto my memory,
For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards mee,
O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree ;
I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.

Critical Appreciation. A little under two years before his ordination, John Donne was riding westward on Good Friday, 1613, and as he rode he reflected upon his westward journey, turning his back upon the Cross, riding away from the Saviour. This poem was the fruit of his meditation.

It is Good Friday, the day of all days in the year to turn to the east and contemplate the Saviour of the world. But the poet is riding westward (probably from Sir Henry Goodyer's home in Warwickshire to stay with the Herberts in Wales). The conflict between this westward journey and the spirit of devotion within him turning his thoughts eastward involves him in tension and discord. This conflict is like that of the spheres which, if left free to follow their nature ("natural form"—line 6) would travel from west to east ; but the Primum Mobile (the "first mover"—line 8) and other influences, like the ninth sphere ("foreign motions"—line 4) resist this successfully and cause them to travel from east to west, as Donne is himself doing. Every sphere has its Intelligence or Angel in control, and Devotion is the controlling influence in his soul, considered as a sphere. Devotion ought to have its way and turn him eastward but, protest as it may, with "pleasure or business" (line 7) in command, he must travel westward, away from Christ.

This is not a descriptive poem about a journey, despite the title. It states, considers, resolves, the problem which the journey creates. The clash of the two journeys awakens in him the spirit of contradiction. As he travels westward he meditates upon the Crucified, and so travels eastward in his mind. This he can do without real conflict because the memory is seated at the back of the brain and can look, naturally and without effort, upon Him.

A substantial part of the poem is given to the contemplation of Christ. The conflict of the two journeys excites the spirit of paradox ; and as he makes these tremendous statements—for instance : "a Sun, by rising set" (line 11)—the horror of the Crucifixion so grips him that his mood changes, and he is almost glad not to make the eastward journey (lines 15 *f*) The shift of position, due to his repulsion from the Cross by its inherent nature (and so religiously acceptable), begins his reconciliation to the westward journey, and emboldens him to question the conventional devotion of contemplating Christ. The basic antithesis of the poem has conditioned him to apprehend truth by contrast. The paradoxes which he has uttered so surely now turn back upon their creator to involve him directly. The moment of revelation comes, when the spirit of contradiction within him shatters the devotional attitude of looking at Christ. How glibly we can talk of surveying the wondrous Christ, self-confidently supposing that all its purpose is achieved by so doing ! But the truth, which had never occurred to him before, is that He looks upon us : "For that looks towards them/and thou look'st towards me" (lines 35)—the contrast between the devotion of people towards Him, and Christ looking towards them, is the dramatic moment of truth when the conflict is resolved.

Devotion has been in control all the time, turning him away from the east. But the eyes of Christ have been upon him, and now he understands that his back is turned that he may receive correcting chastisement, by which Christ will restore him to His likeness ; so that, when he turns, He will recognize him.

Much that is characteristic of Donne is to be found in this poem. For instance :

(*a*) His intense self-awareness, causing him to argue with himself, and wrestle with his state, leading on to an increasing awareness of Another, implied by reason of his problem in the beginning, who at the end is the One to whom he speaks ; thus from self-scrutiny he moves, by argument and conversation, to devotion.

(*b*) The use of the learned "conceit" of the sphere and its Intelligence, with its "correspondence" between microcosm and macrocosm, fusing emotion and thought : At first it seems a far-fetched analogy, but the poet works it out accurately, fully, and in the end justifies it as an exact, appropriate illustration of his meaning, capable of bearing the weight of the whole poem.

(*c*) The use of contrast, paradox, and argument which the poem embodies is the experience, not a description of it. (The poem, by changing and developing the discussion, resolves the conflict).

(*d*) The adaptation and reversal of the familiar and conventional : Just as the title *The Ecstasy* introduces a different experience from ecstasy as normally understood, the emphasis being upon the return to, and not emancipation from, the body, so the title "Riding Westward" introduces a journey which has significance in relation to the east. In the same way the conventional Good Friday devotion is reinterpreted to emphasize the Lord looking upon us. And, yet another example of adaptation, "turning one's back" is no longer an act of separation or repudiation. The poem could be called "Turning one's back on Christ". Turning one's back becomes an act of penitence. Often it is the opposite of something familiar which provides him with fresh insight.

(*e*) Finally, we have here, impressively, his reconciliation to the created order, to life as it must be lived. The journey which, at the beginning, is opposed to true devotion, is continued, and accepted at the end as directed by its Intelligence, Devotion. It is a journey westward.

"The movement of thought in *Good Friday* has been projected by a series of images : the image of the moving of spheres around a magnetic centre, and of contrary forces at work on them ; the image of Jesus on the Cross—first pictured as a rising and setting sun, and later as a vast paradox containing infinite space and yet subject to infinite humbling and reduction ; the image of Mary ; and finally, the image of the speaker in his own person appealing directly to Christ. Paralleling this movement, the tone of the language develops from that of intellectual and scientific reasoning (lines 1—10) to one of earnest prayer at the end. In between, the subtle reasoner of the opening lines has become the factual observer (lines 11—14), the humble and awe-struck apologist for himself (lines 15—32), the object of God's attention (lines 35-36), and the humble penitent (lines 37-38). The statement has grown increasingly personal as though with the development of his poetic theme the author had actually come closer to God and God become more particularly attentive to him, until he is emboldened to make the final appeal of the closing couplet."

NOTES

Lines 1-2. The beginning of the poem is at once scientific and religious. Imagine that man's soul is a sphere, like one of the heavenly bodies, and imagine that the intelligence (or the guiding spirit) which moves this sphere is pious devotion. *intelligence*—a guiding spirit or angel who directs and governs the laws by which heavenly bodies move.

Line 6. *naturall forme*—the essential nature of a thing.

Line 8. *first mover*.—a philosophical phrase denoting the creative aspect of God.

Lines 3—8. *And as the other spheres......and are whirld by it*—The heavenly bodies have distorted orbits because of the influence of the motions of other spheres. So it is with the soul, which is often "whirled" or deflected from its true course of piety by the distractions of business or pleasure.

Lines 9-10. It is Good Friday when the whole attention of the poet's soul should bend eastward—that is, toward the place where Christ was crucified. He is, however, riding westward whither worldly concerns are taking him.

Lines 15—18. At the same time the poet feels afraid of contemplating divine sacrifice (the Crucifixion of Christ). It would be a terrible experience for him to look eastward and see the living God directly. It would be terrible to gaze upon God dying on the Cross.

Lines 25-26. *that blood which is/The seat of all our soules*—In medieval physiology, blood was regarded as the vehicle uniting the soul to the body.

Lines 29—32. *If on these things......which ransom'd us*—If the poet dares not look at Christ being humbled and tortured to death, how can he dare to look at the suffering of Christ's mother, Mary who must be given half the credit of the Divine Sacrifice which redeemed mankind ? ("To look at" here means to contemplate and to visualise so vividly that these events—Crucifixion, etc.—would seem to the devout soul to be actually taking place).

Lines 33—35. *Though these things......towards mee*—Even though the poet is riding away from the scene of these tragic events, they are yet present to his memory. His memory turns to these events, and Christ who is the Saviour looks toward the poet mercifully.

Lines 36—42. *O Saviour, as thou......and I'll turne my face.* The poet here makes an appeal to Christ the Saviour who was hanged upon the Cross. The poet may be riding westward but his thoughts turn westward. He would like to be punished and chastised for his worldliness, for his errors, for his sins so that his soul is cleansed and he can then turn his face eastward. He wants the influence of Christ's mercy and grace to prove stronger than the influence of the secular world, so that his weak soul may find its proper orbit.

40. A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany

In what torne ship soever I embarke,
That ship shall be my embleme of thy Arke ;
What sea soever swallow mee, that flood
Shall be to mee an embleme of thy blood ;
Though thou with clouds of anger do disguise
Thy face ; yet through that maske I know those eyes,
  Which, though they turne away sometimes,
    They never will despise.

I sacrifice this Iland unto thee,
And all whom I lov'd there, and who lov'd mee ;
When I have put our seas twixt them and mee,
Put thou thy sea betwixt my sinnes and thee.
As the trees sap doth seeke the root below
In winter, in my win   now I goe,
  Where none but th   th' Eternall root
    Of true Love I m   know.

Nor thou nor thy religion dost controule,
The amorousnesse of an harmonious Soule,

But thou would'st have that love thy selfe : As thou
Art jealous, Lord, so I am jealous now,
Thou lov'st not, till from loving more, thou free
My soule : Who ever gives, takes libertie :
O, if thou car'st not whom I love
Alas, thou lov'st not mee.

Seale then this bill of my Divorce to All,
On whom those fainter beames of love did fall ;
Marry those loves, which in youth scattered bee
On Fame, Wit, Hopes (false mistresses) to thee.
Churches are best for Prayer, that have least light :
To see God only, I goe out of sight :
And to scape stormy days, I chuse
An Everlasting night.

Critical Appreciation. Donne wrote this hymn to Christ on the occasion of his departure on a sea voyage. He accompanied Lord Doncaster as chaplain to Germany on a diplomatic mission in May, 1619. The hymn expresses Donne's feelings on the occasion.

While getting ready for the voyage, the poet prepares himself for death. It is quite possible, he thinks, that his ship might get wrecked and that he might be drowned in the sea. But he does not experience any fear and does not give himself up to disappointment or despair or depression. He puts his faith in Christ who proves a source of consolation and courage to him. On this occasion he also sheds his worldliness, and offers his whole-hearted love and devotion to Christ.

The most notable feature of the poem is Donne's complete trust in Christ. He looks upon the ship he will board as a symbol of the Ark, and the sea that is likely to swallow him as a symbol of the blood which Christ shed to redeem mankind. Christ may sometimes be annoyed with him because of his sins ; Christ may turn away his eyes from him sometimes ; but Christ can never hate him (or anybody else), because Christ is full of compassion and love for all.

The poet is willing to forget his country and all those whom he has loved or who have loved him. The seas will, in any case, separate him from his island home and his loved ones. What the poet wants is that Christ should ignore his sins. The period of his separation from his country and his loved ones will be a period of wintry desolation for him. During this period he wants Christ to give him the necessary comfort and keep him cheerful.

Christ demands all the love that a man is capable of. Christ does not want that a man should divide his love between Him and worldly possessions. The poet appeals to Christ to free his soul from all love of material things. The poet would like to offer all his love to Christ only.

The poet declares that he wishes to divorce everything that he has loved in his life. He discards fame, wit, a desire for advancement in life, because these are all deceptive things. His only desire

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Stanza I. *torne ship*—
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has two other meanings : (*i*)
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In what torne ship soeve
what dilapidated ship I bo
regard that ship as a sacred
not matter in which sea I am
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mankind.

Though thou with cloud
Your face, O Christ, may be
displeasure. Yet through tha
may turn away from me som
never show any hatred for a

Stanza II. *this Iland*

When I have put......an
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nothingness in your eyes.

As the tree's sap doth
winter, the sap in a tree dra
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Stanza III. *controule*

now is to see God, and so he chooses the everlasting darkness of death (because after death he will be able to see God). Apart from the spiritual quality of the poem, its imagery is noteworthy. Even in his divine poems, Donne does not refrain from using the kind of imagery that, properly speaking, suits only love-poetry. In this poem, for instance, he speaks of "the amorousness" of his soul ; he speaks of his "jealousy" ; he seeks all Christ's "love" ; he speaks of "divorcing" all worldly interests ; he speaks of fame, wit, and hope as false "mistresses", and he wants that his love for these things should be "married" to Christ. One cannot help noting this incongruity in Donne's expressing his spiritual devotion in terms of sexual love.

NOTES

Stanza I. *torne ship*—incapacitated ship ; ship which is liable to sink. *embarke*—board a ship. *embleme*—symbol. *Arke*—Literally the word "ark" means a box. But, in the Biblical context, it has two other meanings : (*i*) the Ark was a covered floating vessel in which Noah and his family were preserved during the Deluge. (*ii*) Ark of the Covenant, which means a wooden coffer containing tables of the Jewish law. Here, however, the word has been used to mean a sacred vessel. *thy blood*—the blood of Christ who suffered martyrdom to redeem the sins of mankind.

In what torne ship soever......of thy blood (lines 1—4)—No matter what dilapidated ship I board for my voyage to Germany, I shall regard that ship as a sacred vessel symbolising you, O Christ ! It does not matter in which sea I am drowned, because I shall regard that sea as symbolic of your blood which was shed for the redemption of mankind.

Though thou with clouds of anger......will despise (lines 5—8)—Your face, O Christ. may be hidden behind clouds indicative of your displeasure. Yet through that veil of clouds I can see your eyes which may turn away from me sometimes because of your anger, but which never show any hatred for anyone.

Stanza II. *this Iland*—England.

When I have put......and thee (lines 11-12)—When the ocean separates me from my loved ones, I would expect you to put an ocean between my sins and yourself. Let there be such a long distance between my sins and you, that my sins are reduced to mere nothingness in your eyes.

As the tree's sap doth seeke......I may know (lines 13—16). In winter, the sap in a tree draws nourishment from the roots which are embedded in the earth. The period of my separation from my country and from my loved ones will be like a winter in my life. In this state of wintry desolation, I can draw comfort only from you, because you are the everlasting root of true love which will afford to me the consolation and the courage which I shall need.

Stanza III. *controule*—check ; restrain. *amorousnesse*—loving quality ; (here used for spiritual love, or the love of the poet for Christ). *harmonious Soule*—balanced or composed soul.

But thou......thyselfe (line 19)—But you would like to have for yourself all the love that I am capable of. You would not like to divide my love between you and anybody else. You would like to possess my love in its entirety.

As thou/Art jealous......jealous now (lines 19-20)—Just as you do not want that I should give any part of my love to anybody else in this world, I also want that you should love only me and nobody else.

Thou lov'st not, till from loving more, thou free/My soule (lines 23-24)—You do not love me if you do not free my soul from loving anyone except yourself. I shall believe in your love for me only if you rid me of my love for everything in this world, so that I may love you only. (*from loving more*—from loving anyone other than you, O Christ. The word "more" here is used in the sense of "anyone else" or "anyone besides").

Who ever gives, takes libertie (line 22)—If I give my love to anyone, besides you, I shall be taking a liberty which is not justified. I must give all my love to you ; if I also give it to somebody else, I shall be taking a liberty with you, or I shall be doing something improper.

O, if thou car'st not......not mee (lines 23-24)—If you do not care whom I love, it means that you do not love me. If you love me, you will not allow me to love anybody else. If, therefore, you are indifferent as to whom I love, it means that you are not interested in me at all.

Stanza IV. *Seale then this bill......did fall* (lines 25-26)—I wish now to divorce all those to whom I have been giving my love, even though I love them with a diminished intensity as compared to the love which I have been giving to you. I pray to you to confirm this document by which I am divorcing everybody else from my affection. I wish to devote my love only to you, and I wish to forget all those things which have so far been receiving some part of my love.

Marry those loves......to thee (lines 27-28)—In youth one hankers after fame, wit, and advancement in life. One's attention in youth is divided among these mistresses (fame, wit, hopes of rising in life)—But these mistresses are false and do not stick to a man. I now want that all my love for these false mistresses should be transferred to you. I want my love to be married with you.

Churches are best for prayer that have least light......out of sight (lines 29-30). Darkness is best suited for prayer. Therefore a church which has the minimum possible light is the best suited for prayer. I now go only to see God, and I go where human sight fails and where there is complete darkness ; in other words, I go to death. (*go out of sight*—go where human sight fails and there is complete darkness ; go to death. Darkness being best suited for prayer, the poet seeks the darkness of death).

And to scape......night (lines 31-32)—And, in order to escape difficult and distressful days, I have chosen death, the darkness of which lasts for ever. (The poet is preparing himself for death. As he is going on a sea voyage, he imagines that he might be drowned. The whole poem is therefore a kind of preparation for death).

41. Hymne to God, my God, in my sicknesse

Since I am comming to that Holy roome,
  Where, with thy Quire of Saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy Musique ; As I come
  I tune the Instrument here at the dore,
  And what I must doe then, thinke now before.

Whilst my Physitians by their love are growne
  Cosmographers, and I their Mapp, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be showne
  That this is my South-west discoverie
  Per fretum febris, by these streights to die.

I joy, that in these straits, I see my West ;
  For, though their currants yeeld return to none,
What shall my West hurt me ? As West and East
  In all flatt Maps (and I am one) are one,
  So death doth touch the Resurrection.

Is the Pacifique Sea my home ? Or are
  The Easterne riches ? Is *Jerusalem*
Anyan, and *Magellan*, and *Gibraltare*,
  All streights, and none but streights, are wayes to them.
  Whether where *Japhet* dwelt, or *Cham*, or *Sem*.

We thinke that *Paradise* and *Calvarie*,
  Christs Crosse, and *Adams* tree, stood in one place ;
Looke Lord, and finde both *Adams* met in me :
  As the first *Adams* sweat surrounds my face,
  May the last *Adams* blood my soule embrace.

So, in his purple wrapp'd receive me Lord,
  By these his thornes give me his other Crowne ;
And as to others soules I preach'd thy word,
  Be this my Text, my Sermon to mine owne,
  Therfore that he may raise the Lord throws down.

Critical Appreciation. The *Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness* was written by Donne eight days before his death. This hymn is remarkable for its wholesale use of characteristically Donnian imagery drawn from the familiar Elizabethan *mappa mundi*. Discovery and far countries were to the Elizabethans vivid contemporary adventures and apt images to mirror the sense of discovery in the Elizabethan creative mind. The central image of the hymn is of the soul as a "flat map" (second and third stanzas). The explanation of the third stanza is given by Donne himself in one of his sermons :

"In a flat map, there goes no more to make West and East, though they be distant in an extremity, but to paste that flat map upon a round body, and then West and East are all one".

The idea of straits (in the same stanza) as paths to new lands, which are inaccessible except by these paths, is also referred to in a sermon : "narrower way but to a better land". So, in the hymn, the Anyan straits are the Behring straits (leading to the "Eastern riches"), Magellan's straits lead to the Pacific, Gibraltar is the route for Jerusalem (fourth stanza) : "All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them".

The idea of west and east was natural to an Elizabethan, fascinated with the "round world" as an exciting potent idea : when transferred to religion it is a paradox of central importance. The west is death, decline, the setting sun. But the same sun also rises, and Christ is named "Oriens", which means both "East" and "Rising". In *Good Friday 1613, Riding Westward* we read that the soul is not a flat map, but a sphere : the poet's body rides west but the "soul's form bends towards the East", *i.e.*, towards Christ.

About this hymn, a critic says : "Had Donne written often thus it had been vain to blame and useless to praise him".

NOTES

that Holy roome (line 1)—heaven.

thy Quire of Saints (line 2)—the choir of saints who keep singing in heaven in praise of God.

I tune the Instrument (line 4)—The "instrument" here stands for the poetic faculty. "Tuning the instrument" means writing this poem (addressed to God).

by their love (line 6)—by their loving attention to my diseased body.

Cosmographers (line 7)—geographers ; men skilled in depicting the features of the heavens and the earth in maps.

This is my south-west discoverie (line 9)—The south is the zone of heat, or fever ; the west is the region of decline (because the sun sets in the west). The poet describes his dying of fever as the discovery of a passage to a new world.

Per fretum febris (line 10)—by the heart, and strait, of fever.

by these streights to die (line 10)—The word "streights" or "straits" has two meanings here : (1) narrow difficult ways ; narrow channels of water ; and (2) sufferings ; rigours.

Lines 9-10. The south is the hot quarter, the west is that of the sun's decline. The poet is to die by the "raging heat" (*fretum*) of fever, or to travel by the strait (*fretum*) of fever.

I see my West (line 11)—I see my death, or my ultimate destination.

As West and East......the Resurrection (lines 13—15). "West" represents "decline" and, therefore, death. "East" represents Christ (because Christ was born in the East or in the Orient. Christ is also called "Oriens" which means both "East" and "Rising"). For this reason, death is merely the prelude to resurrection or another life (life in heaven). The poet says that his death on earth will merely mean the beginning of a new life in heaven.

Pacifique Sea, Easterne riches, Jerusalem (lines 16-17). These proper names are only intended as metaphors to convey the peace and happiness that one enjoys in heaven.

Anyan (line 18)—the Strait of Anyan or Annam which supposedly divided America from Asia.

none but streights (line 19). One can get to the Pacific and the East by going through the straits. But the other meaning of the word "straits" has also to be kept in mind. Thus : "all the ways of getting to the Pacific and the East are through sufferings, risks and rigours.

Japhet, Cham, Sem (line 20). They were the sons of Noah. Among them was the world divided. Europe was allotted to Japhet, Africa to Cham or Ham, and Asia to Sem.

We thinke that......stood in one place (lines 21-22)—The word "place" here means the country or region. "Calvary" was the name of the place where Christ was crucified. "Christ's Cross" refers to the Crucifixion. The accepted view was that Paradise stood in Mesopotamia, near Damascus ; but, according to a legend, Christ died in the same place where Adam was buried.

Looke Lord, and finde both Adams met in me (line 23). The poet says that he is a combination of the first Adam (who sinned against God) and the second Adam, namely Christ, who by his blood redeemed or saved mankind.

last Adams blood (line 25). the blood of Christ who gave his blood as a sacrifice for the sake of mankind.

His purple (line 26). "Purple" here refers to (*i*) Christ's blood which redeemed mankind ; (*ii*) Christ's divine cloak which commends a soul to God and assures its salvation ; and (*iii*) the redness which has been caused in the cheeks of the poet by his high fever.

By these His thornes (line 97). The "thorns" here refer to the poet's sufferings which are regarded as a re-enactment of the sufferings of Christ.

to mine owne (line 29). to my own soul.

42. A Hymne to God the Father

Wilt thou forgive that sinne where I begunne,
Which is my sin, though it were done before ?
Wilt thou forgive those sinnes through which I runne,
And doe them still : though still I doe deplore ?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For, I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sinne by which I wonne
Others to sinne ? and, made my sinne their doore ?
Wilt thou forgive that sinne which I did shunne
A yeare, or two : but wallowed in, a score ?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For, I have more.

I have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne
My last thred, I shall perish on the shore ;
Sweare by thy selfe, that at my death thy sunne
Shall shine as it shines now, and heretofore ;
And, having done that, Thou hast done,
I have no more.

Critical Appreciation. This hymn was composed by Donne during a serious illness. He caused it to be set to music, to a most grave and solemn tune, and used to have it sung often by the choir of St. Paul's Church, in his own hearing. About this hymn, he said to a friend : "The words of this hymn have restored to me the same thoughts of joy that possessed my soul in my sickness when I composed it. And, O the power of church-music ! that harmony added to this hymn has raised the affections of my heart, and quickened my graces of zeal and gratitude ; and I observe that I always return from paying this public duty of prayer and praise to God with an unexpressible tranquillity of mind, and a willingness to leave the world". Indeed, this hymn ends on a note of peace and security that is absent from much of his religious poetry.

The poem is a kind of confessional. It contains the poet's confession of his sins. But, in addition to that, the poet also seeks God's forgiveness of his sins and is confident that the forgiveness will be forthcoming.

The first sin mentioned by Donne is the original sin, the corruption into which we are all born as a consequence of Adam's sin. (Adam's sin was disobedience to God in tasting the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden). His next sin is that he has been luring other people into sinful ways. Furthermore, he may have abstained from sin for a year or two, but he rolled in sin for twenty years. Finally, he has the sin of fear : his fear is that he will not be able to cross the sea of eternity after his death and that he will perish on the shore.

The poet wants that the light of Christ's mercy should fall on him at his death. If God gives him an assurance that this will be done, the poet will shed all his fear and face death with a feeling of confidence.

A curious device that the poet employs here is punning on his own name, and the pun is repeated twice. The pronunciation of the name "Donne"* is the same as that of the word "done". Therefore the expression "thou hast not done" in line 5 and line 11 means

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*The name "Donne" should not be pronounced as "Don" The correct pronunciation is "Dunn" or "Done".

(*i*) "You have not yet finished the matter" ; and (*ii*) "You have not Donne" (*i.e.*, "You have not won over Donne to your side). Likewise the expression "Thou hast done" in line 17 means (*i*) "You have finished or ended the matter" ; and (*ii*) "You have now won over Donne to your side". This punning in a hymn sounds like levity or frivolity, but in Donne's time this sort of thing was not thought to be inconsistent with the most solemn thoughts. There is a pun in line 16 also where the words "thy son" are used to mean (*i*) Christ who is the son of God ; and (*ii*) the sun which, under God's control, shines upon this world.

The poem is completely free from conceits. The extreme simplicity of the poem is a measure of the poet's sincerity.

NOTES

Wilt thou forgive......were done before ? (lines 1-2)—Will you, O God, forgive me for the sin which I have inherited from mankind's first ancestor, Adam ? This sin is my sin, even though it had actually been committed by our original parents (Adam and Eve).

that sinne where I begun (line 1)—original sin and, therefore, the corruption into which all human beings are born as a consequence of Adam's sin. ("Original" sin was Adam's disobedience to God in tasting the forbidden fruit.)

Wilt thou forgive......deplore ? (lines 3-4)—Will you, O God, forgive me for the sin which I continue to commit even though I feel sorry for committing it. (This sin is also disobedience to God or following the Devil).

When thou hast done......I have more (lines 5-6)—Even if you have forgiven me for my sin, the matter is not finished and you have not won me over to your side, because I have to confess more sins.

When thou hast done (line 5)—When you have forgiven me. *Thou hast not done* (line 5)—There is a pun on the word "done" * The name "Donne" is pronounced exactly like the word "done". So this clause means : (*i*) You have not finished the case ; or you have not seen the end of the matter ; and (*ii*) You have not got Donne (or me) ; you have not won me over to your side.

Note. This pun is repeated in each of the next two stanzas.

Wilt thou forgive......their doore ? (lines 7-8)—Will you forgive my sin in inducing others to commit sin ? I have sinned in luring other people into sin. I have thus shown them the path that leads to sin. Will you forgive me for this sin also ?

Wilt thou forgive......a score (lines 9-10)—I was a habitual sinner. I may have refrained from sin for a year or two. But I indulged in sin, as one might indulge in some luxury, for twenty years. Will you forgive me for this too?

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*As already pointed out in Chapter 1 of this book, Donne had once before also indulged in this punning. When his marriage proved disastrous from the worldly point of view, he wrote to his wife : "John Donne, Ann Donne Un-done".

When thou......more (lines 11-12)—Even when you have forgiven me for these sins, the matter does not end. Even by forgiving me for these sins, you cannot win me over to your side because I have still more sins to confess.

I have a sinne of feare......on the shore (lines 13-14)—Another sin I have committed is the sin of fear. I am afraid that, when my life on earth comes to a close, I shall perish on the shore instead of being able to cross the sea of eternity and go to the other side.

Sweare by thy selfe (line 13)—The poet now wants God to swear by Himself in order to give him a solemn assurance.

that at my death......and heretofore (lines 15-16)—The assurance which the poet wants is this : When he dies, let the mercy of Christ (Thy sun) shine on him just as the sun is shining on him now and has been shining on him in the past. (*Thy sunne*—Christ is often referred to as the son of God. But it also means the "sun". *heretofore* —in the past ; till now), The light of Christ's mercy will draw the sinning poet from the darkness of hell.

Note. In line 15 there is a pun on the word "sunne". It means (*i*) Christ ; and (*ii*) Sun.

And, having done that......I fear no more (lines 17-18)—If you forgive my sin of fear also, then the matter ends (and then you have won me over to your side). Then there is no cause for me to feel any fear.

43. Satyre : of Religion

Kinde pitty chokes my spleene ; brave scorn forbids
Those teares to issue which swell my eye-lids ;
I must not laugh, nor weepe sinnes, and be wise,
Can railing then cure these worne maladies ?
Is not our Mistresse faire Religion,
As worthy of all our Soules devotion,
As vertue was to the first blinded age ?
Are not heavens joyes as valiant to asswage
Lusts, as earths honour was to them ? Alas,
As wee do them in meanes, shall they surpasse
Us in the end, and shall thy fathers spirit
Meet blinde Philosophers in heaven, whose merit
Of strict life may be imputed faith, and heare
Thee, whom hee taught so easie wayes and neare
To follow, damn'd ? O if thou dar'st, feare this ;
This feare great courage, and high valour is.
Dar'st thou ayd mutinous Dutch, and dar'st thou lay
Thee in ships woodden Sepulchers, a prey
To leaders rage, to stormes, to shot, to dearth ?
Dar'st thou dive seas, and dungeons of the earth ?
Hast thou couragious fire to thaw the ice

Of frozen North discoveries ? and thrise
Colder than Salamanders, like divine
Children in th'oven, fires of Spaine, and the line,
Whose countries limbecks to our bodies bee,
Canst thou for gaine beare ? and must every hee
Which cryes not, Goddesse, to thy Mistresse, draw,
Or eate thy poysonous words ? courage of straw !
O desperate coward, wilt thou seeme bold, and
To thy foes and his (who made thee to stand
Sentinell in his worlds garrison) thus yeeld,
And for forbidden warres, leave th' appointed field ?
Know thy foes : The foule Devill (whom thou
Strivest to please), for hate, not love, would allow
Thee faine, his whole Realme to be quit ; and as
The worlds all parts wither away and passe,
So the worlds selfe, thy other lov'd foe, is
In her decrepit wayne, and thou, loving this,
Dost love a withered and worne strumpet ; last
Flesh (it selfes death) and joyes which flesh can taste,
Thou lovest ; and thy faire goodly soule, which doth
Give this flesh power to taste joy, thou dost loath.
Seeke true religion. O where ? Mirreus
Thinking her unhous'd here, and fled from us,
Seekes her at Rome ; there, because hee doth know
That shee was there a thousand yeares agoe,
He loves her ragges so, as wee here obey
The statecloth where the Prince sate yesterday.
Crantz to such brave Loves will not be inthrall'd,
But loves her onely, who at Geneva is call'd,
Religion, plaine, simple, sullen, yong,
Contemptuous, yet hansome ; As among
Lecherous humors, there is one that judges
No wenches wholsome, but coarse country drudges.
Graius stayes still at home here, and because
Some Preachers, vile ambitious bauds and lawes
Still new like fashions, bid him thinke that shee
Which dwels with us, onely perfect, hee
Imbraceth her, whom his Godfathers will
Tender to him, being tender, as Wards still
Take such wives as their Guardians offer, or
Pay valewes. Carelesse Phrygius doth abhorre
All, because all cannot be good, as one
Knowing some women whores, dares marry none.
Graccus loves all as one, and thinkes that so
As women do in divers countries goe
In divers habits, yet are still one kinde,
So doth, so is Religion ; and this blind-
nesse too much light breeds ; but unmoved thou
Of force must one, and forc'd but one allow ;
And the right ; aske thy father which is shee,

Let him aske his ; though truth and falshood bee
Neare twins, yet truth a little elder is ;
Be busie to seeke her, beleeve mee this,
Hee's not of none, nor worst, that seekes the best.
To adore, or scorne an image, or protest,
May all be bad ; doubt wisely ; in strange way
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray ;
To sleepe, or runne wrong, is. On a huge hill,
Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will
Reach her, about must, and about must goe ;
And what the hills suddennes resists, winne so ;
Yet strive so, that before age, deaths twilight,
Thy Soule rest, for none can worke in that night.
To will, implyes delay, therefore now doe :
Hard deeds, the bodies paines ; hard knowledge too
The mindes indeavours reach, and mysteries
Are, like the Sunne, dazling, yet plaine to all eyes.
Keepe the truth which thou hast found ; men do not stand
In so ill case here, that God hath with his hand
Sign'd Kings blanck-charters to kill whom they hate,
Nor are they Vicars, but hangmen to Fate.
Foole and wretch, wilt thou let thy Soule be tyed
To mans lawes, by which she shall not be tryed
At the last day ? Oh, will it then boot thee
To say a Philip, or a Gregory.
A Harry, or a Martin taught thee this ?
Is not this excuse for mere contraries,
Equally strong ? cannot both sides say so ?
That thou mayest rightly obey power, her bounds know ;
Those past, her nature, and name is chang'd ; to be
Then humble to her is idolatrie.
As streames are, Power is ; those blest flowers that dwell
At the rough streames calme head, thrive and do well,
But having left their roots, and themselves given
To the streames tyrranous rage, alas, are driven
Through mills, and rockes, and woods, and at last, almost
Consum'd in going, in the sea are lost :
So perish Soules, which more chuse means unjust
Power from God claym'd, than God himselfe to trust.

The Argument of the Poem*. Religion is worthy of all the devotion of our soul. The joys which await us in heaven should prevent us from following the path of evil. If the pagan philosophers of olden times could be received by God in heaven, why should Christians not aspire to the same treatment especially when they have easier means of reaching God. All the courage which people show in the fields of war, exploration, and other risky enterprises is useless if the courage to fight against evil is wanting. People try to please the Devil who is their enemy. They love this world which is also their enemy and which is no better than an aged and withered prostitute. They also seek the pleasures of the flesh which is destructive, and they detest their souls. **Let people seek true religion**. (*Lines 1—43*).

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*See also Chapter 8 ("The Satires of Donne") in this book.

But where is true religion to be found ? One man seeks it at Rome, another at Geneva, another at home (that is, in England). Another detests all religions as being false, and another loves all religions as being essentially the same. But people should choose the true religion without allowing themselves to be co-erced into adopting a particular religion. Truth and falsehood are near twins, but truth is a little older. **Truth is thus** closer to the Primitive Church or to the primitive state of mankind. **There is no harm in doubt**, though the doubt should have a rational basis. **Nor is there any harm in investigating which is the true religion**. What is undesirable is to become indifferent to religion or to choose the wrong religion. (*Lines 43—79*)

Truth stands on a huge hill which is cragged and steep. He who wishes to reach truth must go this way and that, trying to overcome the resistance which the steepness of the hill offers. **One must strive to find truth during one's life-time.** When death comes, it will be too late to strive for truth. One must act in the present, without delay. Difficult physical deeds demand hard physical labour ; difficult knowledge demands hard mental effort before it can be attained. (*Lines 79—88*).

One should keep the truth one has found, without feeling afraid of earthly kings who are merely the instruments of Fate and not the representatives or deputies of Fate. The soul should obey the laws of God and not the laws of man, because by the laws of God will it be judged on the Doomsday. It will not avail for anyone to offer the plea that he acted under the authority of King Philip, or Pope Gregory, or King Henry, or Martin Luther, because another man who followed an opposite course can offer a similar plea also. (*Lines 89—99*).

One should find out the limits within which anybody in a position of authority must function. Only then can one rightly obey the man of authority. Authority should not be obeyed if it exceeds its limits. The ultimate source of earthly power is God himself, and those only can prosper who entrench themselves around this source. **One should yield only to the power of God and not to the will of earthly tyrants**. (*Lines 100—110*).

Critical Appreciation

Something significant and valuable in this poem. This is regarded as the best of Donne's satires. The theme here is serious and lofty. The poet has something significant and valuable to say here. His message may be summed up thus : Religion is worthy of our whole-hearted attention. **We should show courage not merely in risky enterprises like wars and voyages of exploration but in fighting**

against Satan, the enemy of God. We should not try to please the Devil ; we should not love the world and worldly concerns ; and we should not love sensual pleasures. We should seek true religion, and in seeking it we should not spare any effort. In seeking the true religion we should seek the help and guidance of others. Nor is there any harm in doubting what seems wrong. A severe and prolonged mental effort is needed for the discovery of truth. After discovering the truth we should keep it and not let it slip from our hands. We should obey only the power of God and not the power of earthly tyrants.

A liberal view of religion. Donne here shows a liberal and broad-minded approach to religion, and this was something rare in his times. He does not speak as a partisan. He is not fanatical and he is not dogmatic. He does not even mention the various Christian sects by name. He merely urges us to discover the truth by our own efforts. This exhortation seems to open the way for an individualistic approach to religion. Each man can discover his own truth. This should mean that religion is one's own affair and that one need not even conform to any particular sect or religion, though we wonder whether Donne would have gone so far as to say so in specific terms.

The element of wit in the poem. Like other satires, this poem shows Donne's brilliant wit. This wit appears partly in the similes and metaphors which Donne employs here. A love of the world and worldly goods is compared to a love of an aged and withered prostitute. He who is attracted by Calvinism is compared to a man who wants to his satisfy his lecherous appetite with robust but coarse country girls. He who abhors all religions is like the man who, knowing some women to be whores, dares not marry any woman (fearing that all may be whores). Truth stands on a hill which is cragged and steep (which is a metaphorical way of saying that truth is not easily accessible). Divine mysteries are like the sun, dazzling, yet plain to all eyes. People who, instead of relying on God's power, depend on the will of arbitrary rulers, are like flowers which, uprooted, fall into a swift current that carries them into the sea, thereby destroying them. All these metaphors and similes enhance the interest of the poem, apart from making the meaning more clear. Some of them are witty. In fact Donne's wit pervades the whole poem as is inevitable in a satire.

Some of the essential ideas of the poem find expression in condensed, pithy statements which are memorable : "Know thy foes", "Seek true religion". "Though truth and falsehood be/Near twins, yet truth a little elder is". "Doubt wisely". "On a huge hill,/ Cragged and steep, truth stands". "To will, implies delay, therefore now do". "Keep the truth which thou hast found".

Here is a critic's opinion about this poem : "In his third satire, on the search for true religion, Donne is inspired by his subject in itself, and his wit and his similes never get out of hand.

He is not merely witty, but passionately witty, or wittily passionate, and the poem gives an unforgettable picture of an eager mind at work—for even here Donne is in a sense dramatic, as he is in nearly all his best and most characteristic work. The poem proves, too, that his investigation of the rival claims of the Roman and Anglican Churches, although it may have been begun partly, or even perhaps largely, from motives that we should call worldly, was nevertheless prosecuted with what we should call 'sincerity', a burning sincerity, for the rough lines of this satire are penetrated by an intense eagerness for truth." On the discovery of this truth, according to Donne, depends the soul's salvation. The poet shows a deep contempt for an attitude of indifference towards truth. This is, in a sense, factual rather than doctrinal, and is to be attained, not in some beatific vision, but as the result of a long and laborious process of historical, or semi-historical research ; for truth, says Donne, is a little older than falsehood ; that is to say, the true religion is that which is nearest to the Primitive Church. Truth, then, is to be attained by a careful comparison of rival arguments about *a matter of fact*, the question to be decided being : which Church is. *as a matter of fact*, nearest to the Primitive Church ? And faith, in this context, consists in the belief that a really thorough and disinterested research will discover this factual truth, and that God will guide such a disinterested pursuit of truth. We must seek for truth, says Donne, but where is it to be found ? Some seek it at Rome, because she was there a thousand years ago, others at Geneva, others at home, while some are content to suppose that all religions are the same Actually it is to be found on the top of a hill which one has to toil hord to climb (that is, it is to be found only through a severe and prolonged mental effort).

Here is another comment : "Only the third satire, on religion, seems wholly to have engaged Donne's personal feelings. It is here that there occur those famous lines (79—84) on truth which are Donne at his absolute best as a poetic craftsman. The third satire is particularly interesting when the early date of its composition is remembered. It offers, at a time when Donne's interest in religion was certainly not a professional one, a reasoned and reasonable protest against extremism and schism. Significantly, Rome is already lumped with other European churches and not accorded any special sanction. Characteristically English, in spirit, the poem rejects any absolute, permanently 'true' form of religion in favour of an empirical, relative approach :

> As women do in divers countries go
> In divers habits, yet are still one kind,
> So doth, so is Religion.

Such broad-mindedness and op mindedness is a clear indication of Donne's natural dislike of all intractable claims to unique truth. Two words in this satire 'doubt wisely' (*i.e.*, suspend judgment) support the sense of the famous 'truth passage', which from a Catholic point of view is heretical enough. The advice, in line 89, 'keep the truth which thou hast found', lays a thoroughly Protestant onus on the individual to make up his own mind ; and later, in the peroration, the laws of God and the laws of man are sharply contrasted to the discomfiture of the latter which, Donne suggests, are the canon of most dogmatic religionists. And the final condemnation is of those who "choose men's unjust power from God claimed" rather than "God himself to trust".

The modernity of this controversy between God's word and its differing interpreters makes the third satire the most readable and interesting of the five and the most important in any study of Donne. Its homogeneity, its lucidity and its objectivity, and also its lack of sensationalism, make it far less Juvenalian, far less of a 'farrago' (*i.e.*, medley) than the first two satires which run much more to type".

NOTES

Kinde pitty chokes my spleene (line 1)—My ire or wrath is kept in check by my feelings of pity. I become enraged to see the corruption in society, but my pity for people suppresses my rage.

brave scorn forbids......eye-lids (lines 1-2). My eye-lids are swollen with tears which I have to restrain because of my "brave scorn". I feel like weeping over the sins of society, but my pride checks my tears and so my eye-lids swell with those tears (which could not be shed).

Lines 1-2. The poet "turns to an evidence of human folly which equally evokes his derisive anger and his fellow-feeling of pity, so that the two impulses frustrate each other".

I must......wise (line 3)—A wise course for me would be neither to laugh at, nor weep over, these sins.

Can railing......maladies ? (line 4)—Is it possible for me to cure society of these old and deep-rooted ills by railing against them in my poetry. (*rail*—scold ; speak slightingly of. *worn maladies*—old and established evils).

the first blinded age (line 7)—the ignorant, pagan times before Christianity came.

Is not our Mistresse......blinded age ? (lines 5—7)—Religion is compared to a dearly loved woman. This woman (that is, religion) deserves our whole-hearted devotion, just as strictly righteous conduct was highly esteemed by the ignorant people of the pre-Christian, pagan times.

Are not heavens joyes......was to them ? (lines 8-9)—A sense of honour kept in check the evil tendencies of those people of pagan times. They were ignorant and superstitious people, and yet they scrupulously observed an earthly code of honour. Should not, then, Christ's promise of heavenly joys to us be an incentive enough for us to exercise control over our evil passions ? (*valiant*—strong ; brave. *asswage*—to calm ; to pacify ; to control. *lusts*—evil passions).

Line 9. "Pagan devotees of virtue, knowing nothing of an after life, made earthly honour the focus of their moral code".

Alas,/As wee do them......in the end (lines 10-11)—It is a pity that, while we have richer means at our disposal, those people of olden times should excel us in attaining the goal. (The idea is that Christianity affords more effective means to spiritual uplift, but that, in spite of these means, the pagan people got nearer to the spiritual goal than Christians can).

and shall thy fathers spirits......damn'd ? (lines 11—15)—Those ignorant, pagan philosophers of old might have been received by God in heaven. Their strict virtue might have been interpreted by God as faith. But how about the Christians ? Christians were shown by Christ the easy path to heaven and yet they might be damned because they have not followed that path. The Christians might go to hell while the pagans went to heaven.

O if thou dar'st......high valour is (lines 15-16)—Let the Christians show their courage by feeling afraid of damnation. There is great heroism in this kind of fear. (This is a paradoxical statement but it means that it is an act of courage to feel a terror of God's wrath. We should not defy God but feel awed by His might).

Note. In lines 17—28, the poet cites various situations demanding courage and bravery and comes to the conclusion that this kind of courage is worthless. Real courage lies in fighting against the Devil and waging war against evil.

Dar'st thou ayd......to dearth ? (lines 17—19)—Do you have the courage to side with the Dutch in their war of freedom against the Spaniards ? Do you have the courage in lie in wooden coffins on ships and face the danger of death which may come to you as a result of the fury of an army leader, or as a result of a storm on the sea, or as a result of shooting, or as a result of starvation ? *sepulchers*—coffins. *dearth*—want ; starvation).

Dar'st thou dive seas......earth ? (line 20)—Do you have the courage to dive into the depths of the ocean, or to descend into the caverns of the earth ?

Hast thou couragious fire......discoveries (lines 21-22)—Do you have so much fire in you as to defy the freezing cold of the North Pole and to go on a voyage of exploration in an effort to discover a north-west passage to the Pacific ? (This is a reference to the voyages of discovery of the Elizabethan Age).

and thrise/Colder than Salamanders......for gaine beare (lines 22—26). Do you have enough coolness in you to be able, for the sake of earthly gain, to endure the heat of equatorial countries ? And do you have enough coolness in you to stand the heat in which you may be condemned to burn by the Spanish Inquisition for being a heretic ?

Salamander—lizard-like animal supposed to live in fire ; (therefore, person who can endure great heat).

divine children in th' oven—This is a Biblical reference. King Nebuchadnezzar threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into a furnace for refusing to worship a golden idol. But they remained unharmed.

fires of Spain—fires in which heretics, condemned to death by the Spanish Inquisition, were burnt.

the line—the Equator.

limbeck—kind of scientific apparatus. (The idea is that equatorial countries are so hot that they are like ovens in which human bodies go through agonizing heat).

and must every hee......poysonous words? (lines 26–28)—Are you so brave that, if anyone refuses to treat your mistress as a goddess, you will fight him with a sword or force him to swallow an insult from you? (*draw*—draw a sword. *eate*—swallow; tolerate. *poysonous words*—insulting words).

Note. In lines 17—28 examples have been given of the different manifestations of courage: fighting in wars; undertaking dangerous voyages of exploration; enduring the heat of equatorial regions; etc. etc.

courage of straw (line 28)—But the poet describes all these kinds of courage as worthless.

thy foes (line 30)—the forces of evil. *and his* (line 30)—and God's foes: *i.e.*, the forces of evil). *who made thee......garrison* (lines 30-31)—God who appointed you a soldier in his army on this earth to fight against evil.

And for forbidden warres (line 32)—for wars which are not justified from the moral point of view.

leave th' appointed field? (line 32)—withdraw from that field of battle where you were appointed to fight (against evil forces).

Know thy foes (line 33)—You should recognize your enemies (*i.e.*, the Devil and his supporters).

thy foule Devill......to be quit (lines 33—35)—You are foolish in trying to please the Devil by doing wicked deeds. The Devil is so wicked that he will place his whole kingdom of hell under your control provided you continue to do his bidding. But the Devil will do so out of his essential hatred for you, not because he loves you.

thy other lov'd foe (line 37) the other enemy whom you love, namely, the world and worldly goods. (The first enemy is the Devil. The other enemy is the world and all that is worldly. They are your enemies, but you still love them.

in her decrepit wayne (line 38)—The world which you love is now in a state of decay and decline (like a woman who has grown very old).

Dost love a withered and worne strumpet (line 39)—Your love for this world, which is in a state of decline, is like your loving an aged, worn-out harlot or prostitute. (*strumpet*—harlot; prostitute) *last/Flesh......lovest* (lines 39—41)—Lastly you love flesh and the pleasures of flesh. Flesh is its own enemy. Sensual pleasures lead to ruin. (The sins of the flesh soon bring about one's death which then destroys the flesh).

and thy faire goodly soule......loath (lines 41-42)—The fair and noble soul gives vitality to your flesh or your body and makes it possible for the body to enjoy sensual pleasures. And yet you despise the soul and love only the body. You ignore your spiritual welfare and concentrate on physical enjoyment.

Seeke true religion (line 43)—This is the central idea of the poem. This is the poet's message to the reader. This is the nucleus round which the poem has been built.

O where ? (line 43)—The question is where to find true religion.

Note. Lines 43—68 contain an account of how different types of people try to approach truth in various ways and from different routes, and how they are mistaken. The poet gives us a brief description of how Christians of different sects adopt a narrow approach. Mirreus, Crantz, Graius, Phrygius are imaginary names of persons who follow different sects of Christianity.

Mirreus (line 43)—one who burns incense ; a Roman Catholic.

Thinking her unhous'd here—thinking that Truth does not reside here in Protestant England.

her ragges—the worn-out remains of the Roman Catholic faith.

as wee here obey......yesterday (lines 47-48)—as the English people show reverence to the very canopy under which the king sits, though the king may be absent from his seat at the moment.

Crantz (or, Grantz)—a garland or wreath. The name has German and Dutch associations.

brave loves (line 49)—showy rituals of the Roman Catholic faith.

inthrall'd (line 49)—bewitched ; captivated.

But loves her onely......drudges (lines 50—55)—Crantz (or Grantz) loves only the truth which was available at Geneva, the home of Calvin and the most rigorous Puritanism. Calvinism is homely, simple, obstinate, young, scornful, and yet unattractive. He who insists that Truth is to be found in Calvinism is like a man of lecherous or lascivious taste, who thinks that the only women worth enjoying sex with are those who live in the country and are hard-working and rough. (The rigid and rigorous Puritanism of Calvin is compared to hard-working and coarse country women).

Graius (line 55)—a Greek.

vile ambitious bauds (line 56)—foul pimps who wish to gain wealth and influence by offering their mistresses to all who ask for them.

and lawes/Still new like fashions (lines 56-57)—Religion under Queen Elizabeth was regulated by several laws intended to uphold the Anglican settlement.

Graius stayes still......Pay valewes (lines 55—62)—Graius is the type of man who does not go to Rome or Geneva to seek Truth. He stays on in England and abides by the advice of some preachers who tell him that the Anglican settlement offers the best means of finding truth. He accepts this advice, like the wards who have to marry brides selected for them by their legal guardians. (*valewes*—values ; fines).

Godfathers (line 59)—spiritual guides (among whom are those who frame laws for regulating religion).

tender to him (line 60)—offer to him.

being tender (line 60)—because he is weak and easily influenced.

Pay valewes (line 62)—pay the fines imposed on them in the event of their refusing to marry girls selected for them by their guardians.

Carlesse Phrygius (line 62)—"Carelesse" means "not caring for any of the courses open to him in the matter of selecting a faith". Phrygius means a person who is faced with a multiplicity of faiths from amongst which he has to choose one.

Whores—prostitutes ; women of loose morals.

Lines 62—64. Phrygius rejects all faiths because he finds it impossible to choose one out of so many. He is like the man who, having come across some women who are no better than prostitutes, refuses to marry any woman because he thinks that all women are immoral.

Gracchus (line 65)—a person of liberal ideas. *all as one*—each of them equally.

divers (line 66)—several. *habits* (line 67)—costumes. *one kinde* (line 67)—of the same nature or temperament.

so doth, so is Religion (line 68)—Religion appears in different shapes in different countries but is essentially the same, just as women all over the world have the same nature even though their dress varies from country to country.

and this blindness too much light breeds—and this blindness is caused by too much light. (A liberal-minded man finds the light of truth in every religion. So he cannot distinguish true from false. He is blinded to the one real truth).

but unmoved thou......And the right (lines 69—71)—But you should remain unaffected by all motives except one—namely, the search for the one true religion. You must necessarily recognize only one religion as true, and even under a threat of violence you should not bow to any other religion. (*of force*—perforce ; necessarily *forc'd*—under compulsion ; under duress).

aske thy father which is shee (line 71)—If you are uncertain as to which is the true religion, seek the guidance of your father who knows more than you.

Let him aske his (line 72)—If your father is also uncertain, let him ask his father.

though truth and falsehood......elder is (lines 72-73)—Although truth and falsehood are begotten of the same parents, and are like twins, truth came into this world a little earlier than falsehood. (This should not be taken to mean that the Roman Catholic faith, being older, is truer than Protestantism. Donne here appeals to the primitive state of the Church, and then of mankind altogether. He also means to say that, as time passes, we shall move farther and farther from truth).

Hee's not of none......the best (line 75)—The person who in a state of uncertainty is seeking the true religion should not be accused of belonging to no religion at all ; nor should he be deemed as belonging to the worst religion. A quest for the true religion is thus a legitimate activity.

To adore......or protest (line 76)—to be a Roman Catholic, or anti-Catholic, or a Protestant. (Roman Catholics worship images or idols ; anti-Catholics scorn image-worship or idolatry ; Protestants actively oppose image-worship.

May all be bad (line 77)—All these—image-worship, scorn of image-worship, and opposition to image-worship—may be bad. A dogmatic attitude may be wrong. "Easy certainties may be undesirable in themselves in a situation where the truth is not simple or easily come by".

Doubt wisely (line 77)—This exhortation is often quoted from this poem. It means that doubt or a sceptical attitude is not bad in itself, if the doubter exercises proper judgment.

To stand inquiring......or runne wrong, is (lines 78-79)—There is nothing wrong in coming to a halt and asking which way leads to the destination. Making inquiries about the right road does mean that one is lost. What is wrong is to fall asleep or to start running along the wrong road. In other words, it is not wrong to seek the help and guidance of others in finding the truth. To become indifferent to truth, or rashly to accept the wrong faith—this is a mistake.

On a huge hill......winne so (lines 79—82)—Truth is not easy to come by. It stands on a huge hill which is rugged, rough, and steep. Climbing this hill to reach the truth is a tough job. One must go this way and that way, climbing up steadily though slowly. One must in this way overcome the resistance that the steepness or abruptness of the hill offers to one's progress. (The idea has here been expressed by means of a metaphor. Finding the truth is an arduous process involving trial and error).

deaths twilight (line 83)—the semi-darkness of death.

therefore now doe (line 85)—therefore actively begin your quest.

Hard deeds, the bodies paines......reach (lines 86-87)—Difficult deeds can be performed only through physical labour. Similarly hard knowledge can be achieved only through the exertions of the mind.

and mysteries......to all eyes (lines 87—88)—There are certain religious mysteries which baffle us; and yet they are not impossible of solution. They are like the sun the dazzling light of which blinds us but which is yet visible to us. (The truths of religion are not easily grasped by our minds. But that does not mean that we should stop our quest of truth).

In so ill care here (line 90)—in such an evil condition (in respect of the salvation of one's soul).

that God hath......to Fate (lines 90—92)—God has not given kings a free hand and a moral right to kill whomsoever they wish to kill because of their hatred for them. Nor are kings the proxies of God. They are merely the instruments of Fate and they can kill only those whose death is willed by Fate or desired by God.

Fool and wretch......the last day? (lines 93—95)—The poet scolds those who allow their souls to be subordinated to man-made laws. On the Doomsday, souls will be judged and tried according to divine laws, not human ordinances.

will it then boot thee? (line 95)—will it then be of any avail to you?

Philip—Philip II of Spain. *Gregory*—Pope Gregory VII, who claimed that the Pope was infallible and had final power over secular rulers. *Harry*—Henry VIII. *Martin*—Martin Luther who started the Protestant movement.

Note. It will be of no avail for you, says the poet, to offer the plea that you acted under the authority of some secular or religious head.

Is not this excuse......say so? (lines 98-99)—Can the same plea not be offered by a person of the opposite faith? (Two persons may belong to two different or opposed faiths. On the Doomsday one of them may defend his actions by saying that he acted under the authority of the King or the Pope. But the other person can defend his opposite actions by offering the same plea. Both of them cannot be right. The idea is that one should seek divine sanction, not human authority, for one's faith).

That thou mayest rightly......idolatrie (lines 100—102)—In order that you may rightly obey authority, you should find out the limits within which that authority must function. If a man in authority exceeds those limits, he is changing the very character and concept of his authority. If you still obey his authority, it is not obedience but idolatry. Such obedience on your part is unjustified.

As streames are, Power is (line 103)—Power or authority is compared to streams. The simile is explained by the poet in the lines that follow.

those blest flowers......than God himselfe to trust (lines 103—110) —Those lucky flowers, which grow at the calm source of a rough river, flourish and fare well. But if these flowers are uprooted and fall into the angry current of the river, they are driven through mills, rocks, and woods and are ultimately destroyed and swallowed by the sea. In the same way, those people who root themselves round the source of earthly power are sure to prosper in the spiritual sense. (The source of earthly power is God himself). But those who yield to the will of earthly tyrants, instead of yielding to God's power, will come to grief. Earthly tyrants become more violent and arbitrary, the further they move away from God.

44. Elegie : On his Mistris

By our first strange and fatall interview,
By all desires which thereof did ensue,
By our long starving hopes, by that remorse
Which my words masculine perswasive force
Begot in thee, and by the memory
Of hurts which spies and rivalls threatned mee,
I calmely beg ; but by thy parents wrath,
By all paines which want and divorcement hath,
I conjure thee ; and all those oathes which I
And thou have sworne, to seal joint constancie,
Here I unsweare, and over-sweare them thus :
Thou shalt not love by meanes so dangerous.
Temper, oh faire Love, loves impetuous rage,
Be my true mistris still, not my feign'd page.
I'll goe, and, by thy kind leave, leave behinde
Thee, onely worthy to nurse in my minde
Thirst to come back ; oh, if thou dye before,
From other lands my soule towards thee shall soare.
Thy (else Almighty) Beauty cannot move
Rage from the seas, nor thy love teach them love,
Nor tame wilde Boreas harshness ; Thou hast read
How roughly hee in peices shivered
Faire Orithea, whome he swore hee lov'd.
Fall ill or good, 'tis madness to have prov'd
Dangers unurg'd ; Feede on this flatterye,
That absent lovers one in th' other bee.
Dissemble nothing, not a boy, nor change
Thy bodies habit, nor mindes ; bee not strange
To thy selfe onely ; All will spye in thy face
A blushing womanly discovering grace.
Richly cloth'd Apes are call'd Apes, and as soone
Ecclips'd as bright, wee call the moone, the moone.

Men of France, changeable Camelions,
Spittles of diseases, shops of fashions,
Lovers fuellers, and the rightest companie
Of Players which uppon the worlds stage bee,
Will quickly knowe thee, 'and knowe thee ; and alas
Th' indifferent Italian, as wee passe
His warme land, well content to thinke thee page,
Will haunt thee, with such lust and hideous rage
As Lots faire guests were vext : But none of these,
Nor spungie hydroptique Dutch, shall thee displease,
If thou stay here. Oh stay here, for, for thee
England is only'a worthy gallerie,
To walk in expectation, till from thence
Our greate King call thee into his presence.
When I am gone, dreame mee some happinesse,
Nor let thy lookes our long hid love confesse,
Nor praise, nor dispraise mee, blesse, nor curse
Openly loves force ; nor in bed fright thy nurse
With midnights startings, crying out, oh, oh,
Nurse, oh my love is slaine ; I saw him goe,
Ore the white Alpes, alone ; I saw him, I,
Assayld, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleede, fall, and dye.
Augure mee better chance, except dreade Jove
Think it enough for mee, to'have had thy love.

Critical Appreciation. *Elegy XVI* (*On His Mistris*) stands foremost among the poems of this category written by Donne. The occasion for the writing of it was a projected visit by Donne to some foreign country. His wife, Ann, expressed a desire to go with him, and she suggested that she could accompany him in the disguise of a boy-servant. Donne rejected the proposal out of hand, and wrote a poem as an explanation of his reasons.

The argument of the poem runs thus : "I request you not to insist on going with me in the disguise of a boy-servant. I make this appeal to you in the name of our first meeting, in the name of all the desires that we experienced after meeting each other, in the name of our long-unfulfilled hopes, in the name of the tender feelings which my vigorous, persuasive words produced in you, and in the name of our memories of the harm with which I was threatened by my enemies. I also make this appeal to you in the name of the sufferings we have undergone and all the oaths which we took to remain devoted to each other. I appeal to you not to adopt this dangerous method of showing your love for me. I would urge you to control the rashness which is born of your passion and not to assume the disguise of a boy-servant. Let me go alone. If unfortunately you die when I am abroad, my soul will fly from there to visit you here (or to meet your soul here). (**Lines 1—18**).

"Your beauty is all-powerful. But it cannot exercise any control over the sea or over the stormy winds. You know very well how cruel Boreas, the god of the north wind, can be. Why should you court danger by undertaking a voyage when you can avoid it ? You can satisfy yourself with the thought that lovers may be physically away from each other but that spiritually they always remain together. Do not therefore put on a boy's clothes. In a boy's disguise you can deceive yourself only. Others will see through the disguise and quickly discover your identity as a woman when they see the feminine blushes on your face. The moon remains the moon whether it is shining brightly or it is in a state of eclipse. (**Lines 19—32**).

"Your honour will be in danger if you go with me. Frenchmen, who are given to fashions of all kinds, who suffer from venereal diseases, who keep their passions inflamed, will quickly recognise you as a woman and will try to seduce you. Nor will the Italians spare you, even if they believe that you are a boy, because they are as immoral as the men of the ancient city of Sodom were. There will be danger also from the drunken Dutchmen. The best course for you is to stay on here in England throughout your life. (**Lines 33—46**).

"When I am gone, think of some good fortune befalling me. Do not feel sad on account of your separation from me. Do not see bad dreams about me. Do not wake up in the middle of the night, in a state of fright, crying out that in a dream you have seen me being stabbed and killed by enemies. Imagine me being favoured with good fortune and not being chased by misfortune. I shall fare well unless Fate thinks that I have had enough of your love and that I do not deserve more of it." **(Lines 47—56)**

The poem is remarkable for its realism. The sincerity of the poet's love for his wife is unmistakable. His passionate love is expressed in the following lines :

Oh, if thou die before,
From other lands my soul towards thee shall soar.

However, he is aware of her limitations. Her beauty is "almighty" but it cannot subdue the fury of the elements.

The characteristics of Frenchmen, Italians, and Dutchmen are vividly depicted and the danger she will face from those people is convincingly brought home to her. No woman, after being made aware of this danger, will insist on going with her husband to those foreign lands. The psychology of a woman who feels excessive concern for her husband's welfare is powerfully portrayed in the closing lines which describe the woman's frightening dream of her husband being attacked and killed. Indeed, it is a deeply moving poem, full of genuine tenderness.

The following comment on this poem may be noted : "*On His Mistress* has sometimes been read as a chapter of autobiography. The theme of the elegy is that the mistress would disguise herself as a boy in order to go abroad with her lover......The *idea* is not original :

it is the poem's personal tone, and certain details probably the result of actual experience, which make it much more than a literary exercise on a set theme. No one can help being moved by the slow, serious opening lines :

> By our first strange and fatal interview,
> By all desires which thereof did ensue,
> By our long starving hopes......

which go on their measured way, piling up clauses like pleas. Equally remarkable is the curiously vivid, realistic glimpse into the future as the mistress's fears imagine it, when the poet begs her not to let herself panic when he is away :

> Nor in bed fright thy Nurse
> With midnight startings, crying out, "oh, oh,
> ... ...
> ....I saw him I,
> Assailed, fight, taken, stabbed, bleed, fall, and die.

The dramatic suddenness of the girl's cry to her nurse is reminiscent of one of those stabbing felicities of Webster. The piled-up, monosyllabic verbs occur elsewhere in Donne : in the elegies, and in the Holy Sonnets. This passage, however, is, as a whole, curious and interesting ; beneath the force of the glimpsed, distant possibility, the poet speaks smilingly, chiding and comforting : the girl is asked not to imagine a scene which is one of the poet's most intensely imagined."

NOTES

By our first strange......I calmly beg (lines 1-7)—The poet makes an appeal to his wife, Ann. He appeals to her in the name of their first meeting, in the name of all the desires they have felt for each other, in the name of their hopes which have remained unsatisfied for a long time, in the name of the pity which his persuasive words produced in her, and in the name of his memories of the harm with which he was threatened by his rivals and by those who were set to spy on his activities.

strange and fatall interview—the meeting of the poet with Ann when they were strangers, and the meeting which proved disastrous for them (in view of the sad consequences of their getting married against the will of Ann's father). *which thereof did ensue*—which resulted therefrom ; which arose from that first meeting. *remorse*—compassion ; pity ; tender feeling. *perswasive force*—persuasive effect.

thy fathers wrath—in the name of the rage which your father felt on coming to know of our marriage.

By all paines......I conjure thee (lines 8-9)—The poet appeals to her in the name of all their sufferings which he and she have experienced on account of their lack of one another, and their separation. *want*—lack. *divorcement*—separation from one another. (The reference is, of course, to the temporary partings caused by the poet's having to go here and there). *conjure*—The word is used for a magician's summoning a spirit. Here, however, the meaning is "to call upon", "to urge", "to plead with".

Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous (line 12)—The poet asks his beloved not to adopt such dangerous methods of proving her love to him.

Temper......my feign'd Page (lines 13-14)—O my beautiful beloved, control the intensity of the passion of your love for me. Continue to be my true beloved always. Do not put on the disguise of a boy-servant to attend upon me. (*temper*—moderate ; dilute ; subdue ; control. *feign'd*—feigned ; pretended ; disguised. *page*—boy-servant).

My soule from other lands to thee shall soare (line 18)—My soul from other lands will fly to you. If you die, when I am in some foreign country, I shall feel so grief-stricken that my soul will fly from there to visit you here.

Nor tame wilde Boreas harshnesse (line 21)—Nor can your love exercise any control over the cruelty of the wild north wind. (Boreas was the god of the north wind in Greek mythology).

Thou hast reade......whom he swore he loved (lines 21—23)—This is a reference to an ancient Greek myth. The god Boreas carried off a girl Orithyia when her father refused her to him in marriage. According to one version of the story, the girl was blown over a cliff by Boreas and killed. The poet mentions this myth in order to show how cruel this god of the north wind can be. He means that he too can become a victim of this god's cruelty, and be killed in a storm on the sea.

to have prov'd/Dangers unurg'd (lines 24-25)—to have undergone dangers which one was not compelled to undergo ; to invite dangers when one should avoid them.

Dissemble nothing, not a boy (line 27)—Do not assume a false disguise ; do not disguise yourself as a boy-servant.

nor change/Thy bodies habite (lines 27-28)—nor should you change the clothes that you wear upon your body. (In other words, do not put on a boy's clothes).

Richly cloath'd Apes......the Moone (lines 31-32)—If a man puts on rich clothes in imitation of somebody else, he will be called an "ape", because apes imitate whatever they see. By mere imitation, one cannot change one's real character or identity. The moon remains the moon whether it shines brightly or it is in a state of eclipse. In the same way, you will remain a woman even if you put on a boy's clothes. Everybody will see through your disguise, and you will be deceiving yourself only.

changeable Camelions (line 33)—changing chameleons ; constantly changing persons. (A chameleon is a creature that can change its colour according to the environment).

Spittles of diseases—hospitals full of diseases, especially venereal diseases. *shops of fashions*—sellers of fashions ; traders in fashions. *Loves fuellers*—inflamers of their own passions. *Th' indifferent Italian* (line 38)—the Italian who is equally ready to take his pleasure with a man or a woman.

As Lot's faire guests were vext (line 41)—This is a reference to a biblical episode, showing the immorality and homosexual tendencies of the people of Sodom, an ancient city notorious for its vice. A man called Lot entertained two angels at his house in Sodom. His house was besieged by a crowd of lustful men demanding the young men inside (not knowing that the young men were angels in disguise). When Lot refused to grant their request, they threatened to use Lot himself as a substitute.

spungy hydroptique Dutch (line 42)—the Dutch people who are spongy or drenched in liquor ; the drunken Dutch people.

England is onely a worthy Gallerie to......his presence (lines 44—46)—England is a fit country for you to stay in. It may be compared to the gallery in which visitors wait expectantly before they are summoned to meet the king. So you, my beloved, stay on here in England till the greatest King, namely God, summons you to His presence. Stay on in England for the whole of your life, because there are dangers abroad.

nor in bed fright thy Nurse (line 50)—Nor should you frighten your nurse by crying out in your sleep when I am gone. "Nurse" here means a female companion.

the white Alpes (line 53)—the snow-covered Alps.

I saw him I......and die (lines 53-54)—Do not dream of me being attacked, captured, stabbed, and killed. Do not see visions of horrible things happening to me. Imagine that I am happy and comfortable. Do not imagine that I will be assaulted and killed in some foreign country.

Augure me better chance (line 55)—Predict some better luck for me than death.

except dread Jove......to have had thy love (lines 55-56)—unless terrible Jove, the supreme god, thinks that I have had enough of your love. There is a possibility of my getting on very nicely when I am abroad, unless Destiny wills it otherwise. If Fate thinks that I have had enough of your love and that I deserve no more of it, then I may meet my end during my visit abroad. But otherwise there are very good chances of my coming back to you, safe and sound.

45. Elegie : To his Mistris Going to Bed

Come, Madame, come, all rest my powers defie,
Until I labour, I in labour lye.
The foe oft-times, having the foe in sight,
Is tir'd with standing, though they never fight.
Off with that girdle, like heavens zone glistering
But a farre fairer world encompassing.
Unpin that spangled brest-plate, which you weare
That th'eyes of busy fooles may be stopt there :
Unlace your selfe, for that harmonious chime
Tells me from you that now 'tis your bed time.
Off with that happy buske, whom I envye
That still can be, and still can stand so nigh.
Your gownes going off such beauteous state reveales
As when from flowery meades th'hills shadow steales.
Off with your wyrie coronet and showe
The hairy dyadem which on you doth growe.
Off with those shoes : and then safely tread
In this loves hallow'd temple, this soft bed.
In such white robes heavens Angels us'd to bee
Receiv'd by men ; Thou Angel bring'st with thee
A heaven like Mahomets Paradise ; and though
Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know
By this these Angels from an evill sprite :
They set our haires, but these the flesh upright.
Licence my roving hands, and let them goe
Behind, before, above, between, below.
Oh my America, my new found lande,
My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd,
My myne of precious stones, my Empiree,
How blest am I in this discovering thee.
To enter in these bonds is to be free,
Then where my hand is set my seal shall be.
Full nakedness, all joyes are due to thee.
As soules unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must bee
To taste whole joyes. Gems which you women use
Are as Atlanta's balls, cast in mens viewes,
That when a fooles eye lighteth on a gem
His earthly soule may covet theirs not them.
Like pictures, or like bookes gay coverings made
For laymen, are all women thus arraid ;
Themselves are mystique bookes, which only wee
Whom their imputed grace will dignify
Must see reveal'd. Then since I may knowe,
As liberally as to a midwife showe
Thy selfe ; cast all, yea this white linnen hence.
Here is no pennance, much lesse innocence.
To teach thee, I am naked first : Why then
What need'st thou have more covering than a man.

Critical Appreciation. *Elegy XIX* : In this poem Donne deals with the subject of sex in too frank a manner. The lover here calls upon his mistress to strip herself naked and join him in bed. He wants her to take off her corset, her breast plate (or stomacher), her gown, etc. and to get into the sacred temple which is "this soft bed". He compares her to an angel who brings for him all the sensual delights which Mahomet promised to the devout. He insists on her casting off every item of her dress and every bit of clothing because he wants "full nakedness".

Whether this poem delights the reader or shocks him will depend the reader's temperament and tastes. Some readers will find it very delicious or delectable. They will enjoy the description of the mistress taking off her clothes one by one till she appears completely nude. The lover now asks her permission to fondle and caress every part of her body. His hands would move all over her—"before, behind, between, above, below". Her body is like America, a new-found land, waiting to be explored by him, and he is blest in discovering her hidden riches. All this may seem to be obscene to certain other readers who will object particularly to those lines in which the lover refers to sexual excitement or erection*, or which refer to coition** These readers may find the closing lines also to be obscene. Here the lover says that he has already undressed himself so that the mistress may follow suit. And he tells her that she needs no more covering than he does, (or that she needs nothing to cover her because he himself will cover her when he mounts her). In short, it is possible to regard the poem as being pornographic.

Whatever our attitude to the poem, the intensity of the lover's passion cannot be denied. It is a voluptuous poem. And yet it has an argumentative quality. The lover gives sound reasons for wanting his mistress to appear in her "full nakedness". For instance, he says that just as souls must discard their bodies in order to enjoy heavenly bliss, so must the bodies discard all clothes in order to enjoy full sexual pleasure. Then he makes a clever use of the myth pertaining to Atalanta. Next, he puts himself into the privileged category of those men who are exalted by women's "imputed grace" and who are therefore entitled to probe into the mysteries of women's bodies.

Donne's ingenuity in expressing his ideas appears in almost each of his poems. The metaphors employed here, for instance, give us some idea of that ingenuity, although none of these is far-fetched or fantastic. In fact, the poem strikes a realistic note, and the language used effectively conveys a passionate lover's ardour.

NOTES

all rest my powers defie (line 1)—my powers defy all rest and sleep. I feel so strong and virile that I cannot sleep without satisfying myself sexually.

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*The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
Is tired with *standing* though he never fight.

**Those set our haires, but these our flesh *upright*.
Then where my hand is set, me seal shall be.

Until I labour (line 2)—till I exert myself sexually. *I in labour die*—I die of impatient expectation. (Come, be quick. I am dying of impatience. Let me satisfy my desire).

The foe off-times......fight (lines 3-4)—If two enemies stand confronting each other without fighting, they will yet feel tired. Likewise, my sexual organ will be tired of waiting if you do not hurry up.

Off with that girdle......this soft bed (lines 5—18)—The lover asks the mistress to take off (*i*) her girdle, (*ii*) her breast plate, (*iii*) her busk, (*iv*) her gown, (*v*) her coronet, and (*vi*) her shoes. He wants her to unclothe herself. (*girdle*—belt worn round the waist. *breast plate*—ornamental covering worn to protect the breasts. *busk*—rigid strip which stiffens the corset-front. *Unlace yourself*—remove the laces with which you have tightened your corset. *coronet*—decorative head-dress. *haiery Diademe*—hairy diadem. (A diadem is a jewelled crown. Here the reference is to her head overgrown with hair).

heaven's zone (line 5)—the belt of Orion ; a circle of stars.

for that harmonious chyms (line 9)—Ladies sometimes wore a chiming watch. The watch has just chimed ; and the lover says that the time has come to go to bed.

hallowed temple (line 18)—sacred temple. The bed is regarded as a sacred temple.

Thou Angel bringst with thee/A heaven like Mahomets Paradise (lines 20—21)—You are an angel for me. When you enter my bed, the bed will become a heaven of sexual pleasures for me to enjoy.

and though/Ill spirits walk in white......our flesh upright (lines 21—24)—Sometimes evil spirits appear in the disguise of angels in order to deceive men. But we can easily distinguish such evil spirits from women. Evil spirits terrify us, and our hair stands on ends. But women please and arouse us, so that we get erection.

Licence my roaring hands (line 25)—Give a licence to my hands to wander over your body. Permit my hands to move over your entire body and to fondle or caress every part of it.

O my America......land (line 27)—You, my beloved, are like a newly-found territory. You are like America to me. (America was discovered by Columbus in 1498. It was still a newly-discovered land in Donne's time).

My kingdome......man'd (line 28)—You are like my kingdom. Your body belongs to me. This kingdom is the safest when inhabited only by one man. Your body should be used by one man only, and I am that man.

Myne—mine (of precious stones). *Emperie*—an emperor's territory.

discovering thee (line 30)—discovering your hidden wealth; **exploring the different delicious parts of your body.**

To enter in these bonds, is to be free (line 31)—If you hold me in your embrace, I shall be a prisoner. But that will be real freedom for me because then I shall enjoy all the pleasure I am waiting for. (*bonds*—fetters; your arms; your embrace).

Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be (line 32)—I shall put my hand at the right spot, and there I shall bring my love-making to a climax.

Full nakedness! All joyes are due to thee (line 33)—I want you to be completely naked because only then the pleasures of love can really be enjoyed.

As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be,/To taste whole joyes (lines 33-5)—Souls must discard their bodies before they can enjoy total heavenly bliss. In the same way, bodies must discard all their clothes before they can enjoy the pleasure of love-making in its entirety.

Gems which you women use/Are like Atlanta's balls, etc. (lines 35-8)—The jewels and ornaments which women wear are compared to the balls or golden apples which Atalanta used in order to frustrate her suitors or lovers.

This is a reference to an ancient Greek myth. Atalanta (or Atlanta) was a very swift-footed woman. She said that she would marry only the man who could defeat her in a race. No man could, until Hippomenes got three golden apples from Aphrodite (the goddess of beauty and love), and threw them down as he ran, so that Atalanta would stop each time to pick up the irresistible prize. That is how she was defeated. But Donne here reverses the simile. Here men are the dupes. Women befool men with their ornaments and jewellery, just as in the story a man befooled a woman with golden apples. Men begin to desire a woman's gems and forget the woman herself.

Like pictures......thus array'd (lines 39-40)—Women decorate their bodies with ornaments. In this way they look like pictures or the bright, attractive covers of books meant for the common people. The result is that men are attracted only by the ornaments and ignore the bodies of women, just as common people are attracted by the attractive covers of books and do not understand their contents.

mystick books (line 41)—mysterious books.

only wee (line 41)—only we, the true lovers.

Whom their imputed grace will dignifie (line 42)—those who are dignified or elevated by a woman's attributing to them her own excellent qualities. (The idea is that a man cannot gain what he seeks by his own merit. It is only when a woman is attracted towards him that she finds in him the grace or qualities which she herself possesses. Then she responds to his advances. She is a mysterious book which he can now read and enjoy. In other words, he is now entitled to have her body revealed to him in its nakedness.

Then, since that......thyself (lines 43-5)—He would now like to see her completely naked just as a midwife sees the nakedness of a woman who gives birth to a child.

cast all—throw aside all your clothes. *this white lynnen hence*—do away with this white linen ; fling away your white linen robe.

There is no pennance due to innocence (line 46)—You do not need your white robe, because the white colour suits one who has to repent of some sin, while you are innocent. (White is the garb of a repentant person, but white is also the colour of innocence. At the same time nakedness also indicates innocence as it did in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were naked before they ate the forbidden fruit. The lover wants the mistress here to appear in her nakedness which will also show her innocence).

To teach thee—to set an example for you ; to encourage you to undress yourself completely. *I am naked first*—I have first undressed myself completely, so that you may follow suit.

Why than/what needst thou have more covering then a man—You do not in this case need more clothes than a man (*i.e.*, myself). (This may also be interpreted thus : You do not need anything else to cover yourself when there is a man who will cover you by lying upon you).

CRITICAL APPRECIATIONS OF SOME MORE POEMS

1. A Valediction : Of the Book

When the lover separates from his beloved, she can employ a device by means of which she can defeat the will of fate and immortalize herself and her lover. She can then win greater glory than Sibyl, who wrote books of prophecy ; than Corinna, who was the rival of the Greek poet Pindar ; than Polla Argentaria, wife of the Latin poet Lucan ; than the Egyptian poetess Phantasia whose works are said to have inspired Homer.

The device suggested by the lover is this : Let the woman compile, from the love-letters which have passed between him and her, a history of their love. This history will provide guidance in matters of love to future lovers. This history will be safe also from any condemnation by heretics.

This book will be permanent like the elements or like the world itself. It will be written in a special language and in a new idiom. Acting as the agents of the priests of love, these two lovers will prepare a work which will enshrine love's learning not to be destroyed even if their land is invaded once again by Goths and Vandals. This book will supply fresh knowledge of all kinds ; it will provide a new music of the spheres and new songs for the angels.

In this book the priests of love will find all that they seek. They will find all the knowledge about spiritual love and all the knowledge about sensual love. After all, even though love dwells in the mind, physical beauty is needed to give a visible shape to love.

From this book lawyers will learn the true legal position of men *vis-a-vis* their beloveds. They will learn how women claim more than is due to them, without giving their lovers anything in return. Lawyers will also learn how women give up their lovers in the name of their conscience and their honour.

Statesmen will find in this book the justification for their (unscrupulous) political activities. There is much in common between love and politics. As long as things go well in politics, as in love, nobody bothers whether any principles are being sacrificed.

The lover will, during all this time, watch his beloved from a distance in order to judge how long their love can last. The intensity of love can best be measured when lovers are together. But how long love will last can best be judged when lovers are away from each other.

Here is a long-drawn-out, elaborate, witty, and hyperbolic conceit centring round the love-letters which have passed between the poet and his beloved. These love-letters can serve as the material for the preparation of a book which—and this is the conceit—will be a kind of encyclopaedia containing multifarious kinds of knowledge.

The satirical touches in the poem should not be missed. There is, for instance, a fling on women in the following lines :

> Who though from heart, and eyes,
> They exact great subsidies,
> Forsake him who on them relies,
> And for the cause, honour, or conscience give,
> Chimeras, vain as they, or their prerogative.

The poem is full of allusions which make it somewhat difficult to understand. The very opening stanza contains references to several literary persons and events. It is the kind of poem which scholars love.

47. Love's Usury

The poet offers to make a bargain with the "usurious God of Love". He wants that in the years of his youth he should not fall truly in love with any woman. As long as he is young, he would like to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh with various women. He would like to "travel, sojourn, snatch, plot, have, forget"—all in order that he may enjoy sensual delights. He wants that his "body" should "reign" (line 5). If he is at one hour making love to the lady, at another hour he would like to make love to the maid (without, of course, letting the lady know). All he wants is that he should not genuinely fall in love with any woman whether from the country, or from the town, or from the Court. This bargain, says the poet, is acceptable to him. On his side, he will, when he has grown old, place himself completely at the disposal of the god of love. As an old man, he will put up with the affliction of being truly in love. He will even agree to love a woman loves him truly.

Here is a love-poem in a thoroughly cynical mood. Two features of this poem are noteworthy. First, the poet expresses a desire to enjoy sensual pleasures with various women. "Let my body reign", he says. He wants to spend his youth in carnal encounters with women. Secondly, he expresses the view that women can rarely be true in love. This idea occurs in the last two lines: "though she be/One that loves me".

Thus in *Love's Usury* we meet a different Donne from the one we met in *The Undertaking*. In that poem he sang about loving virtue in women, but here he speaks of the body and flesh only. Here he is in a mischievous mood. There were, indeed, several facets to Donne's love and all those facets find an expression in the various pieces that we find in the "Songs and Sonets".

48. The Triple Fool

The poet considers himself a fool for falling in love, and he considers himself a fool for expressing in poetry his disappointment and grief which his love has led him to. Thus he is a double fool. But how could he avoid this double folly? He expressed his love in poems, as any wise man would have done, in the hope that his beloved might melt towards him. His other reason for writing poems about his love was that he might in this way find some relief for his sorrow.

But things went wrong, the poet complains. Some musician, wanting to display his art and his voice, set these poems to music and sang them. The listeners felt greatly pleased to hear these poems but the poet's feelings both of love and grief were intensified when he heard them sung. This made the poet consider him a triple fool, because not only his hope of relief was falsified but the two painful feelings which he had tried to imprison in his verse were aggravated and he felt more miserable than before.

The poem shows, more than anything else, the wit of Donne. The manner in which he establishes his triple folly is, indeed, remarkable for its ingenuity. The poem also shows the argumentative or intellectual quality of Donne's verse. The development of thought in the poem is perfectly logical and convincing. Of course, the poet's treatment of his passion is half-serious and half-playful. Some readers may even think the poem to be a mere jest, but the poem is certainly serious in its reference to the writer's feelings of love and grief.

There are a couple of generalizations in this poem which are memorable by virtue of their epigrammatic quality as much as by the thoughts they express:

(*i*) Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,
For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse. (*Lines 10-11*)

(The poet means that when grief is expressed in verse it loses much of its intensity and sting).

(*ii*) Who are a little wise, the best fools be. (*Line 22*)

(Those who have only a little wisdom prove to be the biggest fools. Compare with this Pope's famous line : "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing").

An appropriate simile has been used to express the idea that grief, when expressed in poetry, is lightened :

Then as th' earth's inward narrow crooked lanes
Do purge sea's water's fretful salt away,
I thought, if I could draw my pains
Through rhyme's vexation, I should them allay.

49. A Fever

The poet here states his thoughts and fancies on finding that his beloved is suffering from a fever. He does not want her to die of this fever because, if she dies, he will begin to hate all women to such an extent that he will not then be able to sing even her praises. Nor is it possible for her to die because, if she leaves this world, this whole world will be destroyed. (This is, of course, a conceit, an extravagant fancy). Or, if she dies, the world that is left will be like her dead body : even the most beautiful woman will then be a ghost of the dead beloved, and even the noblest of men will be no better than rotting worms. (This is another conceit. The boundless exaggeration continues). Theological theorists should have realized that, if this world is destroyed by a fire, the source of that fire would be the fever from which the poet's beloved is suffering. (Another conceit).

And yet her fever (or fire) cannot continue very long because it will need much corruption as fuel. Her fever-fit is like a meteor (or shooting star) which soon burns itself out, and her beauty and all her bodily parts are like the sky which is eternal. (Yet another conceit).

The fever in taking hold of her has done what the poet himself wanted to do. (That is, he wanted to seize her in his arms and hold her there). He would like to possess her completely for a short while rather than possess anything else for ever. (The final conceit : an extravagant notion).

Thus *The Fever* is a series of conceits which surprise, startle, but also delight us. The poet here elevates the beloved to a great height. The poem may be regarded as an exaltation of love and of the beloved. It is a poem of intense and concentrated passion. While the intellectual or argumentative element is not absent here, it is subordinate to the emotional element which preponderates. Through his inspired reasoning, the poet is able to overcome his worry and his fear about his beloved's fever. (One critic, however,thinks that the argument in the poem is *forced* but even he admits that there is *true feeling* in it).

The Fever is among Donne's easier poems. One does not have to strain oneself in order to follow its meaning.

50. Break of Day

While in most of Donne's love-poems the speaker is a man (generally, the poet himself), here it is a woman who speaks. The female speaker here is as frank and outspoken as Donne when he speaks in his own person in most of the poems.

The lovers have spent the night together, and the man is getting ready to go away because the sun has risen. The woman wants him to stay on. What does it matter if it is day ? Why should they rise from their bed because of the daylight ? They did not lie down *because* it was *night* : they lay down irrespective of the time. If love could bring them together in spite of darkness, it can keep them together in spite of light.

What can light do to them ? asks the woman. Light cannot *speak* ; it can only *see*. Even if light could speak, what is the worst that it could say ? It would only have said that the woman wanted to stay with her lover and that she did not want to leave the man to whom she had given both her heart and her honour.

Why should his business call him away from her ? It is the worst disease of love that, while it can accommodate all kinds of men —the poor, the foul, the faithless—it cannot accommodate the man of business (*i.e.*, one who has to attend to his business). The man, who has to go to his business and who yet makes love, does great wrong. His love-making is as objectionable as a married man's making love to a woman other than his wife.

Here is an interesting love-poem. The woman's arguments here are perfectly cogent. Why should lovers interrupt their love-making just because the night is over and the sun has risen ? (Did the lover in ***The Sun Rising*** not chide the sun for daring to intrude upon his love-making ?)

It is a poem of complete self-surrender on the part of the woman. She admits having given both her heart and her honour to her lover and is therefore loth to leave him. The poem is thus a passionate utterance by her, and she wins all our sympathy and support. Her claim is irresistible.

The woman justly scolds her lover for wanting to go in order to attend to his business. His putting business above his beloved is unfair, she says. And she gives a pithy and memorable expression to the idea that a man who is too busy making money has no right to play with a woman's heart :

> He which hath business, and makes love, doth do
> Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.

The dramatic quality of the poem is noteworthy.

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PART III

Important Questions with Answers

Q. 1. What is meant by "metaphysical" poetry ? In what sense is Donne a "metaphysical" poet ? Illustrate his use of metaphysical poetry from his poems you have read.

Or

How far are we justified in using Dr. Johnson's label "metaphysical" for Donne ? Illustrate your answer.

Or

Bring out clearly those characteristics of Donne's poetry because of which he is generally described as a "metaphysical" poet.

Or

"The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together." Is this a fair description of Donne's poetry ?

Ans. Dryden expressed the view that "Donne affects the metaphysics." Taking his cue from this statement, Dr. Johnson described Donne and his followers as the metaphysical poets. According to Dr. Johnson, the metaphysical poets were men of learning ; they displayed an **abundance of wit**, if wit be defined as a combination of dissimilar images, a discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike ; they yoked together the most heterogeneous ideas ; they ransacked nature and art for illustrations, comparisons and allusions ; their **subtlety** was surprising ; what they wanted of the sublime, they endeavoured to supply by hyperbole ; frequently they threw away their wit upon false conceits though sometimes they struck out unexpected truth.

Johnson, however, used the word "metaphysical" for Donne's poetry in a rather contemptuous sense, even though much of what he said is certainly applicable to Donne's work. The wit of a metaphysical poet is more intellectual than that of the Elizabethan poets in general ; his conceits have often a psychological value ; his imagery is learned ; his lyrics are characterized by argumentative, subtle development of the theme. But the greatest achievement of a metaphysical poet is a peculiar blend in his work of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination. **Emotional intellectuality** is a leading quality of metaphysical verse. So far as Donne is concerned, one characteristic of metaphysical peotry is a rejection of what is known as "poetic diction" and the use of colloquial speech.

Intellect and wit are among the most striking ingredients of metaphysical poetry, though not its exclusive property. A successful metaphysical poem interweaves those two qualities with its emotional effects in such a way that we are compelled to recognize the tremendous importance of **thought** is poetic achievement.

Donne is the classic representative of this kind of poetry. He was a man whose instinct compelled him to bring the whole of experience into his verse and to choose the most direct and what, for his learned and fantastic mind, was the most natural form of expression. He is colloquial, elevated, slangy, rhetorical, erudite, familiar—all in the same brief poem ; and he takes his language from the court and the camp, from the jargon of the law, from the study, and from the market place.

This curious combination of qualities, it is intersting to note, can be found alike, in his youthful "profane" love poems and in the passionate religious poems of his later life. This would become clear from a comparison of *The Sun Rising* (an early love poem) and *Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward* (a later religious poem). These two poems are indeed unlike in their literal themes and in their feeling toward the central images of universal authority, but the similarity in technique is unmistakable.

When, therefore, we speak of Donne as a metaphysical poet, we generally have in mind the **combination of passion and thought** which characterizes his work. Closely connected with this quality is his **use of conceits** which are often witty and sometimes fantastic. His hyperboles are outrageous and his paradoxes astonishing. He mixes fact and fancy in a manner which astounds us. He fills his poems with **learned and often obscure allusions**. Besides, some of his poems are metaphysical in a literal sense : they are **philosophical and reflective,** and they deal with concerns of the spirit or soul.

All these characteristics need to be illustrated. *The Good-Morrow* is a poem of passion. But its intellectual character is no less evident. The poem is one long argument to prove that the poet and his beloved are passionately in love. What did they lovers do before they loved ? Did they feed themselves on country pleasures or did they snort in the seven sleepers' den ? And here a fanciful conceit is introduced. All the women whom the poet has loved before were merely anticipations of his present beloved. More conceits follow, but without the argument being shelved. Each of the lovers is a whole world to the other, and their little room is a kind of everywhere. Not only that, the lovers are the best possible hemispheres who make up a complete world. These lovers can never die because they love each other with an equal intensity.

The Sun Rising is another passionate poem. But here too the poet argues and reasons. The poet and his beloved have no reason to feel afraid of the sun which has risen, because love does not recognize season or clime. A series of fanciful and fantastic conceits follow to prove that the sun has no power over the lovers. The poet can eclipse and cloud the beams of the sun, while the dazzling light of the beloved's eyes can blind the sun. Both the West and the East Indies lie with the poet in the shape of his beloved. Then comes a conceit which also expresses the passion of the lovers :

> She's all states, and all princes I ;
> Nothing else is.

Sometimes in a poem by Donne passion predominates over the intellect, and sometimes the intellect predominates ; thus the ingredients mingle in varying proportions. In *The Canonization*, the element of passion is undeniable ; it is expressed in such lines as :

> Call us what you will, we are made such by love ;
> Call her one, me another fly,
> We're tapers too, and at our own cost die......

and

> We can die by it, if not live by love...........
> We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms.

This is passion conveyed through beautiful metaphors. But this poem is dominated by the intellectual element which finds expression not only in the conceits mentioning the Eagle and the Dove, and the riddle of the Phoenix, but in the argumentative character of the poem as a whole.

In *A Valediction* : *Of Weeping* the note of passion is intense and concentrated, and bursts forth in such fanciful conceits as ; "When a tear falls, that thou fall'st which it bore" ; "O more than Moon/Draw not up seas to drown me in the sphere" ; "Weep me not dead in thine arms" ; "Since thou and I sigh one another's breath." But there are highly intellectual conceits too. The poet speaks of the cartographer who depicts Europe, Africa, and Asia on a map and who thus "makes that, which was nothing, all" ; in the same way each tear of the beloved is a globe, a world. "The tears of lovers," said Dr. Johnson in his ironical comment on this poem," are always of great poetical account ; but Donne has extended them into worlds." This poem has a profundity of thought and feeling. Donne is always trying to put into words a feeling which overflows expression.

Air and Angels is a poem that has been much discussed by critics. The highly intellectualized nature of the argument is here so refined that it eludes comprehension. The poem has a subtlety which defies analysis. The conceits in it are extremely abstract. But it is a passionate utterance.

To treat of love Donne needs all his philosophy, all his knowledge of science, and natural history, and geography, to expand his emotions. There is much display of learning in *A Valediction* : *Of the Book* which contains references to history, geography, theology, astronomy, astrology, law, politics, etc. And yet this is a poem of passion too. The lover has found a method by which he and his beloved can make such use of their love-letters as "to anger destiny, as she doth." The central conceit here is fantastic. (From their love-letters, the lovers will prepare a book which will provide all the requisite knowledge to love's divines, lawyers, statesmen, and others).

Speaking of conceits, here is an ingredient which gives a special character to Donne's metaphysical poetry. Some of his conceits are, indeed, far-fetched, divorced from reality, bewildering, and intriguing. Dr. Johnson has referred to some of the conceits of this category. Donne shows his medicinal knowledge in one of his verse-letters to the Countes of Bedford. In another verse-letter to the same lady, his lines on the last night of the year have something in them too scholastic, though they are not inelegant. There is confusion worse confounded in the *Epithalamion on the Count Palatine* in some of the lines : "Here lies a she-sun, and a he-moon there......" Who but Donne would have thought that a good man is a telescope ? ("...for by their living here/Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near"). The poetical effect of a lover's name upon glass is thus described. "My name engraved herein/Doth contribute my firmness to this glass." (*A Valediction : Of my Name in the Window*). The meditations of a lover are described in a most indelicate manner in Elegy VIII. (The lover here compares the sweat-drops on his own mistress's breast to balm, but the sweat-drops on the brow of his rival's mistress to rank froth. But what seemed indelicate to Johnson might pass for wit with us). In *The Relic* Donne imagines himself dead and beneath the soil. His grave is opened to admit the body of another and on his wrist the grave-digger finds "a bracelet of bright hair about the bone." Henceforth he and his beloved, because of their great love, will be honoured like saints . "All women shall adore us, and some men." This is an exceedingly hyperbolic conceit. Then there is the comparison of a man that travels, and his wife that stays at home, to a pair of compasses (in *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*). It may be doubted, says Johnson, whether this companion is more absurd or more ingenious. According to Johnson such conceits show a deviation from nature in order to produce a novel or strange effect. There is also that well-known conceit in *The Flea* where an insect is regarded as the marriage-bed and the marriage temple of the lovers who are otherwise not married. There is something ridiculous about a conceit of this kind. Donne continued the use of far-fetched conceits in his religious poetry also. Whether one approves or disapproves of Donne's conceits is largely a matter of taste. We need not be so fastidious or finicky as Johnson ; indeed, it is possible for most of us to enjoy these conceits.

In addition to ingenious, fanciful, hyperbolic, fantastic and ridiculous conceits which are a striking feature of Donne's metaphysical poetry, we find plenty of paradoxical statements in these poems. Thus in *The Indifferent* we find Donne describing constancy in women as a vice, and asks them : "Will no other vice content you" ?

In *The Legacy* the lover becomes his own "executor and legacy." In *Twickenham Garden* the very "truth" of the beloved kills the poet whereas in *The Apparition* it is her scorn that has murdered him. In *Love's Growth*, the poet's love seems to have increased in spring, but now it cannot increase because it was already infinite, and yet it has increased and "No winter shall abate the spring's increase." In *The Prohibition* the poet asks his beloved not to love him, and not to hate him, and he ends by asking her to love and hate him simultaneously. Paradox is thus one more ingredient of Donne's metaphysical poetry.

Next, Donne is metaphysical in a literal sense too He speaks of the soul and of spiritual love. *Air and Angels* is a metaphysical poem in this sense, even though it is necessary for the soul to assume a body in order to be able to act. In *A Valediction : Of the Book* the poet speaks of abstract, spiritual love, though here again the body is required to give love a visible shape. In *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*, love is so refined that the lovers do not much miss each other's eyes, lips, and hands which lovers normally seek. In *The Relic* the lovers do not even know the difference of sex and kiss each other sparingly. But the most famous poem in this connection is *The Ecstasy* in which the souls of the two lovers come out of their bodies and negotiate with each other, though finally they return to the bodies. Donne's muse loves these sudden flights from the material to the spiritual sphere. He often relates those phenomena which lie beyond normal physical experience with those which can be physically experienced.

Donne deserves the title "metaphysical" also because of his obscurity which is sometimes terrible. There are many passages in his verse which baffle the reader. The poem *Air and Angels* is known for its unintelligibility. In this respect Donne is like Browning because the very difficulty in reading him has counted for something in his success, because it became a point of vanity to be subtle enough to apprehend his subtlety, to have enough mental agility to follow his somersaults.

Q. 2. Bring out the leading characteristics of Donne's poetry, with suitable illustrations.

Or

What estimate have you formed of Donne as a poet? Illustrate your answer.

Or

Write a critical note on the merits and the faults of Donne's poetry.

Ans. Donne is among the greatest love-poets in English. His love-poetry is easily distinguishable from the love-poetry of others. His love-poems fall into several categories. There are, first, poems which express the joy of fulfilment. In *The*

Canonization, for instance, sings of a passion which is fully reciprocated by the beloved. He refers to himself as one fly, and to his beloved as another fly; they are tapers too and at their own cost die. They are the Eagle and the Dove; and the Phoenix riddle has more wit by them as the two of them, being one, are the Phoenix itself. Their love is so intense and so sincere that they will be canonized. *The Anniversary* is another such poem. The love of the poet and his beloved is here ever-lasting; they are kings with themselves as the subjects; and they will love nobly, and live for many, many years. In *The Sun Rising* the beloved is "all states" and the poet is "all princes." In *The Good-Morrow* the lovers cannot die because they love each other with equal intensity. The song: "Sweetest love, I do not go" belongs to the same category. Then there are poems in which Donne mocks at love and the female sex. These are satirical poems in which irony plays a great part. The Song: "Go and catch a falling star" and the poem *Constancy* are satires on the love of women who are regarded as fickle and faithless in love. *The Indifferent* is another satirical piece. In *The Legacy* too the poet mocks at his beloved who, he says, has been giving pieces of her heart to her various lovers, without being true to any. In *Love's Alchemy* the poet says that women have no minds. *Love's Deity* refers to the beloved's want of consideration for the poet and mocks at the god of love himself. A third group of poems deal with the spiritual aspect of love and are, therefore, more abstract. *Air and Angels* describes the woman as kind of essence: "some lovely glorious nothing", but points out the need of a body. In *The Relic* the lovers know the difference of sex as little as angels and have barely kissed each other on certain formal occasions. *The Ecstasy*, which is better known, deals with the inter-relation and inter-dependence of the body and the soul. It must also be pointed out that in most of his love-poems Donne adopts an anti-Petrarchan attitude and refuses to regard woman as an object of worship, though he follows the Petrarchan tradition in poems like *Twickenham Garden*. In most of his love-poems Donne is therefore original and novel. His approach is more realistic than that of Elizabethan poets. This lends to his love-poetry a special quality and adds to its value.

Donne is famous for **his mingling of emotion and intellect** in his poems. This mixture is one reason for his being regarded as a metaphysical poet. Many of his love poems are characterized by what may be called "emotional intellectuality". There is passion in *The Sun Rising* but the poem has an argumentative quality. *The Canonization*, despite the intensity of its feeling, is one elaborate argument leading to the conclusion that the lovers will eventually be regarded as saints of love and will be invoked by future lovers wanting to follow their pattern of love. *The Ecstasy* is another highly intellectual poem but the passion is very much felt here:

> **Love's mysteries in souls do grow,**
> **But yet the body is his book.**

Lovers' Infiniteness contains an elaborate intellectual argument. Here is the line of reasoning followed by the poet who is speaking to his beloved : "I have no further means to make you love me more. If when our love was first declared, you withheld some of your love, then some of it must be meant for other lovers. Other lovers may outbid me in sighs and tears for the possession of your love. Even if I had all your love originally, it is possible that a greater capacity for loving may have been created in you by others......", and the argument goes till the poet reaches the conclusion that he and his beloved must join their hearts in order wholly to belong to each other. This is ratiocination. We find the same thing in *Air and Angels* where the highly intellectualized nature of the argument is so refined and subtle that it eludes comprehension. Now this dialectical or ratiocinative or argumentative quality demands much intellectual effort from the reader who wishes to comprehend Donne's meaning. It surely gives weight and substance to his poetry but it makes the poetry tough. This may be regarded as a merit or a fault according as the reader is willing or unwilling to make the necessary intellectual effort for understanding the poems.

Another characteristic of Donne's poetry is an **abundance in it of conceits**—fanciful conceits, farfetched conceits, fantastic conceits, hyperbolic conceits, paradoxical conceits, etc. This characteristic too contributes to what has been called the metaphysical character of Donne's poetry. Some of his conceits are commonplace—a lover dying of love and calling his beloved a murderess (*The Apparition*), hearts being given and received (*The Message*, *The Legacy*), a lover being blasted with sighs and surrounded with tears (*Twickenham Garden*), the beloved sighing away her lover's and her own life away (Song : "Sweetest love, I do not go"), and so on. These conceits are conventional enough. But Donne introduces some original and novel conceits. Thus the poet and his beloved are two hemispheres forming a perfect world—or, it is their eyes which are the hemispheres (*The Good-Morrow*). The poet claims that he can eclipse and cloud the sunbeams with a wink, and that his beloved is a combination of the East Indies and the West Indies (*The Sun Rising*). The beloved is "all states", and the poet "all princes". The poet and his beloved will be regarded as saints and invoked by future lovers seeking a pattern of their love (*The Canonization*). A wreath of the beloved's hair worn by the lover round his arm will protect the lover's dead body from dissolution in the grave (*The Funeral*). A similar wreath of her hair round the lover's wrist-bone will be regarded as a relic and lead to both the lover and the beloved being adored by all women and some men (*The Relic*). But the most fantastic conceits occur in *The Flea* and *A Valediction* : *Forbidding Mourning*. In the former poem, the insect which has bitten the lovers becomes their marriage-bed and marriage-temple : killing it will mean murder, suicide, and sacrilege. In the latter the lovers separating from one another are compared to a pair of compasses. Abstract and metaphysical (in the literal sense) conceits are to be found in such poems as *Air and Angels* and *The Ecstasy*. These conceits were criticised by Dr. Johnson and they have been looked upon with disfavour by many other critics. These conceits may strain the reader's credulity but they do show the writer's ingenuity and imagination ; and it is not clear why they should be regarded as a fault if we are amused, delighted, startled, or even shocked by them.

The satirical talent of Donne is also noteworthy. He has written five poems under the title of "Satires" These satires are wittier than those of his contemporaries. They are also weightier in their criticism of life. They are happier, too, in their portrayal of manners and types. In this respect, some of them are an interesting pendant to Jonson's comedies. *Satire I* describes a walk through London with a giddy ape of fashion who is sketched in a lively manner. *Satire II* opens with a skit on a lawyer turned poet and then becomes a sharp onslaught on his greed and lack of principle. *Satire III* is a grave and eloquent plea for the serious pursuit of religious truth. *Satire IV* is an elaborate mockery of the fashions and follies of court-life. The picture of the bore here is quite realistic. The last of Donne's satires deals with the miseries of suitors. Apart from these poems, some of the "Songs and Sonets" too show a satirical vein, as already indicated above. The satirical and ironical side of Donne's mind appears in the Elegies also. Though Donne is not one of the great satirists, his satirical talent is not inconsiderable and must be regarded as one of his merits as a poet.

Donne's **religious verse** includes *The Litany, La Corona* (a sonnet sequence) and "Holy Sonnets." His religious poetry shows his inner struggle. Although his religious poetry is lacking in the ecstasy of joy, it is not without moral intensity. Some of the holy sonnets, like the one on death, possess a popular appeal, and some of the hymns like the *Hymn to God, my God, in My Sickness*, have become famous. But the finest of Donne's divine poems is perhaps *Good Friday, Riding Westward* where the feeling is most profound. However, it is only in our old age that we can appreciate such poetry. Youth is the time for Donne's "Songs and Sonets," "Elegies" and "Satires".

Not the least of Donne's merits as a poet is his use of **colloquial speech** in his poetry. His is poetry that "talks". He discarded the sugary diction of the Elizabethan poets, and his verse is far removed from Spenserian sweetness. His language is often harsh and his metre rugged. Although he had the power to utter harmonious and pleasing sounds, he seems to have deliberately adopted a **harsh and often staccato method** in order to break away from contemporary tradition. There are irregularities in his rhythm. He is a master of discord. His poems hover between the nging voice of passion and the speaking voice of argument and

expostulation. This dramatic realism of style and versification made him the idol of the first half of the 20th century. In poems like *The Canonization* and *Lovers' Infiniteness* he speaks from the very depths of passion, and he speaks in a **speaking voice**. He seems almost to maltreat language in some of his poems, but only to achieve a more telling effect. The frequent harshnesses in his longer poems come from an attempt to force speech-rhythms on the verse-pattern. Even the lyrics suggest a spoken rather than a sung poetry, spoken with a varying speed and emphasis. The openings of some of his poems arrest us by their abruptness, their dramatic quality, and their colloquial tone :

For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love.
(*The Canonization*)

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us ?
(*The Sun Rising*)

I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Who died before the god of Love was born.
(*Love's Deity*)

Donne is a very difficult poet. His **obscurity** is certainly not a commendable characteristic. This obscurity is due to various causes. Firstly, he packs his verse with learning. He ransacks all the sciences for suitable illustrations. History, geography, astronomy, astrology, chemistry, alchemy, theology, law are all pressed into service for allusions and images. *A Valediction : Of the Book* is an example of this. Secondly, he is too intellectual in some of his poems, and he is often too abstract and metaphysical (in the literal sense, as in *Air and Angels*. Thirdly, he is careless of syntax. The construction of his sentences often baffles the reader. Then there are ambiguities, as in the following lines from *The Relic* :

Coming and going, we
Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals.

Thus a certain amount of scholarship is necessary to understand and appreciate Donne's poems.

Finally, there are elements of **modernity** in Donne, and this is certainly a merit. He is modern in his mingling of the intellectual and the emotional strains in his poetry. He is modern al[illegible] because he appears to think and feel as we do about the "wear[illegible]e condition of humanity." He is mod[illegible] in his realism and [illegible]is rejection of the merely ornamental. An[illegible]e is modern because he is colloquial in his poetry and he does [illegible] sugar his poems with a smooth and superficially pleasurable coating of poetic sweetness.

Donne's great virtues and great faults are equally undeniable and inextricably blended. In his life and in his poetry they are always present to repel and to fascinate. There was nothing in his poetry that appealed to the taste to which

Tennyson ministered, though Browning felt his fascination to the full. Some of the greatest critics have felt nothing but distaste for the frequent ugliness of his imagery and wit, his prosody, the evil strain in his psychology, the "pestilential" character of his theological and pseudo-scientific erudition. To Donne has fallen the unhappy lot, says a critic, of being read only by scholars. But this is not quite true. No English poet of the past has exercised a stronger influence upon the poetry of the younger poets of today, for their experiments too have a root in the consciousness that the ugly and the beautiful are strangely blended in passionate experience, their prosody is a result of an effort to keep metre in touch not only with music but with human speech, and their poetry seeks to charge itself not with experience only but with the metaphysic which strives to transcend and to interpret experience. This is what one of the greatest of 20th century poets has said about Donne : "The more precise and learned the thought the greater the beauty, the passion. The intricacies and subtleties of his imagination are the length and depth of the furrow made by his passion. His pedantry and his obscenities but make us the more certain that one who is but a man like us all has seen God."

Q. 3 "Donne's genius, temperament, and learning gave to his love-poems certain qualities which immediately arrested attention." Discuss.

Or

Illustrate the great variety of mood and tone in the love-poems of Donne.

Or

Write an essay on Donne as a poet of love.

Or

Write a comprehensive note on Donne's love-poetry, emphasising his contribution in this field.

Ans. In his love-poetry John Donne revolted against the Petrarchan tradition. From the time of Wyatt, Surrey, and their contemporaries, English lyrical and amatory poetry had been flowing continuously in the Petrarchan channel. Spenser in *The Shepherd's Calendar* and Sidney with his gallant and passionate sonnets to Stella followed the same tradition. Subsequently poets adopted the same vein in sonnet-sequences, or in pastoral eclogues and lyrics. Of the joy of love, the deep contentment of mutual passion, they have little to say. They dwell on the pains and sorrows of love—the sorrow of absence, the pain of rejection, the incomparable beauty of the lady and her unwavering cruelty. And they dwell on these aspects of love in a series of constantly recurring images : of rain and wind, of fire and ice, of storm and warfare, comparisons with the sun and the moon, with earth's and sea's rich gems, with April's first showers, allusions to Venus and Cupid, Cynthia and Apollo, Diana and Actaeon ; Alexander weeping that he had no more worlds to conquer, Caesar shedding tears over the head of Pompey ; abstractions such as Love and Fortune, Beauty and Disdain ; monsters like the Phoenix and the Basilisk.

Donne was a rebel against the Petrarchan tradition in love-poetry, with its lovers in flower gardens ; its smooth lawns and gentle and murmuring streams ; its goddesses of mythological and pastoral imagery ; and its conventions of chivalry. Now, instead, we have a violent assertion of sexual realism. Donne is neither Platonic nor ascetic, but frankly and honestly sensuous. His interest is in his experience of love, and his endeavour is to understand it, not to deny or suppress it, and still less to present it untruthfully. The presentation is anything but romantic :

> I sing not, Siren-like, to tempt for I
> Am harsh......

In Elegy XI ("The Bracelet"), he deplores the loss of his mistress's bracelet not because it was the colour of her hair or because of any other romantic reason, but frankly because to replace it would cost money. In a variety of ways his early poems communicated the realism of familiar, conventional, contemporary life. His language is colloquial and many of his love-poems, are, simply, talk.

Occasionally, when writing a purely complimentary lyric to Mrs. Herbert or **Lady** Bedford, Donne can adopt the Petrarchan pose. But the tone and temper, the imagery and rhythm, the texture and colour, of the bulk of his love-songs are altogether different from those of the fashionable love-poetry of the sixteenth century.

It would seem that Donne has given as exhaustive an analysis of the psychology of love as he possibly could. In his Love Elegies and the "Songs and Sonets", the individual speaker sometimes loves all women (as in *The Indifferent*), and sometimes he curses, or despairs of, all (as in *Love's Alchemy*), or announces that he is through with love (*The Broken Heart*). Sometimes he says that he can love any woman so long as she is true, or any woman so long as she is untrue. Sometimes he cares only for the woman's body and the physical act of love (as in *Love's Usury*). On at least one occasion he claims to love one woman's virtuous soul (in *The Undertaking*). In some of his best poems he insists that love is properly fulfilled only when it embraces both body and soul (as in *The Ecstasy*, *The Blossom*, and *A Valediction : Of The Book*—stanza IV). Two of the poems (*Confined Love* and *Break of Day*) are written in the voice of a woman, one of them arguing wittily for absolute female promiscuity (that is, freedom to love any number of men). In addition to their varied attitudes and speakers, the poems explore various forms of address : a lover advises other lovers on how best to begin an affair ; he satirises the foulness of another lover's mistress ; he celebrates a full year of love (*The Anniversary*) ; he imagines the future canonization of himself and his mistress as saints of a new religion of love (*The Canonization*) ; he laments the death of his beloved one (*A Nocturnal on St. Lucy's Day*) ; he imagines his own burial (*The Funeral*) ; he makes his will (*The Will*).

Donne rebelled not only against the sugared sonnets in which the Petrarchan convention found expression, but against the whole creed of chivalry and woman-worship. For the sugary language, he substituted a more realistic use of words "such as men do use", and a more dramatic and passionate lyrical verse. As for woman-worship, he looked upon woman as not a goddess but a creature, desirable indeed, though not adorable. However, no poet has at times used the language of adoration more daringly to express the feeling of the moment (*The Sun Rising, A Valediction : Of Weeping, The Dream, etc.*)

There are, indeed, several strands in Donne's songs and elegies. Some of the love-poems are frankly, even arrogantly, sensual. In others the tears of passion are touched with shame and scorn. Others again are directly and splendidly passionate, like the following : "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love" (*The Canonization*) ; "If yet I have not all thy love" (*Love's Infiniteness*) ; "Twice or thrice had I loved thee" (*Air and Angels*) ; "All kings and all their favourites" (*The Anniversary*) ; "Take heed of loving me" (*The Prohibition*). But there are still other poems in which Donne rises to a purer conception of love, neither Petrarchan nor Platonic, but something more concrete than either, compounded of passion and tenderness, mutual trust and entire affection. In *The Ecstasy*, he sings of the inter-dependence of soul and body ; and the Song : "Sweetest love I do not go" expresses a simple but deep affection for his wife.

The variety of mood and tone is, indeed, amazing. There is brutal cynicism in "Fond woman, which wouldst have thy husband die" (Elegy I). There is witty anger in *The Apparition*. There is sharp and paradoxical wit in "The Perfume" (Elegy IV) and "The Bracelet" (Elegy XI). There is passionate dignity and strength in "His Picture" (Elegy V). Elegy XIX is frankly sensual. There is passion that rises superior to sensuality and wit, and takes wing into a more spiritual and ideal atmosphere, in "His Parting From Her" (Elegy XII).

In some of his poems Donne mocks at women and ridicules love. This ironical and satirical vein is evident in the Song : "Go and catch a falling Star", ***Woman's Constancy***, and ***The Indifferent*** in all of which he makes fun of women for their fickleness. In ***Love's Usury*** he seeks promiscuity in love ; his slogan is "let my body reign" (at least in youth). In ***The Legacy*** he mocks at his beloved who has given several pieces of her heart to her several lovers. ***Love's Alchemy*** ends with a sharply satirical attack on women :

Hope not for mind in women ; at their best
Sweetness and wit, they are but Mummy, possess'd.

In *Love's Deity* he mocks at the god of love for trying to extend his power beyond his jurisdiction.

But neither sensual passion, nor gay and cynical wit, nor scorn and anger, is the dominant note in Donne's love-poetry. The finest note here is the note of joy, the joy of mutual and contented passion. His heart might be subtle to torment itself, but its capacity for joy is even more obvious. It is only in the songs of Burns that we shall find the sheer joy of loving and being loved finding expression in the same direct and simple language as in some of Donne's songs, and only in Browning that we shall find the same simplicity of feeling combined with a similar swift and subtle dialectic :

I wonder by my troth what thou and I
Did, till we loved. (*The Good Morrow*)
For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love.
(*The Canonization*)

If yet I have not all thy love,
Dear, I shall never have it all. (*Lovers' Infiniteness*)

Lines like these have the same direct, passionate quality as Burns's

O my love's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June.

The joy is as intense in Donne as it is in Burns, though it is of a more spiritual and intellectual quality in Donne. Nor does Donne fall short of excellence in the note of sorrow and tenderness in his love-poetry. ***The Expiration*** ("So, so break off this last lamenting kiss") is sorrowful and tender. The beautiful, if not flawless, Elegy XVI, "By our first strange and fatal interview" and the "Valedictions" which he wrote on different occasions of parting from his wife, show a combination of passion, tenderness, and intellectual content, as perfect as anything in Browning :

O more than moon,
Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere,
Weep me not dead in thine arms, but forbear
To teach the sea, what it may do too soon.
(*A Valediction : Of Weeping*)

Such wilt be thou to me, who must
Like th' other foot obliquely run ;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.
(*A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*)

But Donne does not write only love-poems dealing with the heart and the senses. He writes purer poems, in more complex moods. *The Prohibition* is a metaphysical poem, not only in the sense of being erudite and witty, but in the proper sense of being reflective and philosophical. So is *The Ecstasy*. *A Noctural on*

St. Lucy's Day is at the opposite pole of Donne's thought from *The Anniversary*. The passion in the former poem is felt through the subtle and fantastic web of dialectic ; and the idea from which the whole springs is the emptiness of life without love. *The Ecstasy* makes us realise fully what Jonson meant by calling Donne "the first poet in the world for some things".

As has been indicated, Donne, in certain superficial respects, continues the Petrarchan tradition. Love is still regarded as a god, and lovers the clergy of that god. Oaths may be made in "reverential fear" of that god's "wrath" ; and the man who resists the god of love is a "rebel and atheist". Donne can even doubt whether those who admit love after a struggle have not lost the god's grace by their resistance, like "small towns which stand stiff, till the great shot/Enforce them" (*Love's Exchange*). Donne can personify the attributes of his mistress, the "enormous giant", her Disdain, and the "enchantress Honour" (*The Damp*), like any Petrarchan poet. But the total effect of Donne's poetry is quite different from that of Petrarchan love-poetry.

One fault-finding critic tells us that the majority of Donne's love-poems deal with variations on five themes, all of them grim—the sorrow of parting (including death), the miseries of secrecy, the falseness of the mistress, the fickleness of Donne, and finally a contempt for love itself. According to this critic, most of Donne's poems describe the torments of a mind which has been baffled in its relation to sexual love by certain temporary and highly special conditions. This critic does take note of Donne's poems of delighted love, such as *The Good Morrow* and *The Anniversary*, but is of the opinion that the appeal of Donne's love-poetry is "limited" and "accidental" and "superficial." This is, however, a prejudiced view.

The technique of Donne's love-poetry deserves some notice, too. A great variety of stanza forms, well over forty in number and rarely repeated, is employed. This diversity is closely related to the changing moods and attitudes of the poet toward the theme of love over many years. The argument in a poem alters its course. Stanza forms vary from poem to poem, because the writer changes too. Now he is impudent, reckless, irresponsible ; now his mind, instead of his emotions, dominates the subject, and in a moment of scintillation he throws out ideas and suggestions which ask to be explored. As a result the poems are rich in pregnant thought. Donne's obscurity and difficulty are not meant to irritate ; they are a valid communication of the essential nature of truth. The poems are natural in being colloquial and argumentative and diverse. The same realism is achieved through the innumerable allusions to the familiar, contemporary scene—everyday home life, a window, a dream, maps and voyages, the human body and its health, law, astronomy, war, love, death, business. There are, too, allusions which appear recondite to us, but which had a familiar meaning in *his* day : "What strike us as unaccountable conceits are simply applications of the current philosophy."

Donne's contribution to love-poetry may then be summed up thus : He introduced a new realism in love-poetry, revolting against the Petrarchan tradition. His poems are an attempt to deal exhaustively with the psychology of love. That accounts for the variety of mood and tone in his love-poetry. Some of his love poems are cynical and he mocks at women and at love. Some poems sing of the joy of love and contented mutual passion. He also introduced colloquial language in love-poetry.

Q. 4. In what sense would you regard John Donne as a "modern" poet ? Illustrate your answer.

Or

Do you think that there are any elements of modernity in the poetry of John Donne ? Give a reasoned answer.

Or

Discuss the contemporary appeal of Donne's poetry.

Or

Donne who was inconsiderable a hundred years ago seems now to rank among the greatest poets. Account for this change in taste.

Ans. There is definitely something "modern" in the poetry of Donne. **Donne is modern, firstly, in his mingling of emotion and intellect in his poems.** In other words, many of his poems are characterised by what may be called "emotional intellectuality". There is intense passion in some of his love-poems, and yet the passion is expressed either through intellectual conceits or by means of argument and discussion. There is passion in *The Sun Rising* but the argumentative vein of the poem gives it an intellectual quality. *The Canonization*, despite the intensity of its feeling, is an elaborate argument leading to the claim that the poet and his beloved will eventually be regarded as saints of love. *The Ecstasy* and *Air and Angels* are highly intellectual and abstract poems, though the note of passion is very much in evidence here. *Lovers' Infiniteness* is another passionate poem containing an elaborate argument. This intellectual quality of Donne's poetry makes a great appeal to the modern mind, because people in our times seek intellectual substance in literature. Modern man is rational and intellectual. Consequently, he is not satisfied with merely passionate utterance like that of the Elizabethan poets before Donne. Some of the conceits that Donne employs have an intellectual quality, too. For instance, in *The Good-Morrow*, the eyes of the two lovers are regarded as two hemispheres forming a perfect world. In *The Funeral*, a wreath of the beloved's hair worn by the lover round his arm is believed to be a protection for the lover's dead body from dissolution in the grave. In the use of conceits, Donne shows a lot of ingenuity. The argument in many of his poems undergoes several turns and twists, and often becomes complicated. And yet, all the time, in many of the pieces in his "Songs and Sonets", Donne celebrates the passion of love.

Another element of modernity is the realism of some of his love-poems. He discarded both Platonic idealism in love and Petrarchan woman-worship. He does not raise woman to a pedestal, does not treat her as a goddess, does not write poems of adoration to her (except occasionally when paying a tribute to ladies like the Countess of Bedford and Mrs. Herbert). His attitude to love is, in general, earthy. He looks upon woman as a partner in the sex act, and is always calling upon her to yield to his advances. He is a believer in the consummation or fulfilment of physical passion, and he is a believer in the pleasures of sex. Nor does he mince matters. He does not see any reason why he should separate from his beloved just because the sun has risen and is peeping through the windows and curtains of his bed-room (*The Sun Rising*). He is ready to have affairs with twenty women—fair and brown, rich and poor, country-bred and town-bred, and so on (*The Indifferent*). He would not like to stick to one woman and is willing to sign a contract with the god of love promising to be faithful to the same woman in his old age if in his youth he can enjoy variety (*Love's Usury*). The woman in *Break of Day* does not want her lover to leave her just because the day has dawned :

> Why should we rise, because 'tis light ?
> Did we lie down, because 'twas night ?

We are attracted to Donne's love-poetry not because it favours promiscuity and indiscriminate love-affairs, but because it takes due note of the body. Donne's attitude to love is down-to-earth. He does write of Platonic or spiritual love, as in *The Ecstasy* and *Air and Angels*, but even here he does not forget the claims of the body. He tries to reconcile the body and the soul, because he does not see any essential gulf or discord between them. In *A Valediction : Of the Book*, he points out that, although spiritual love has its value, the body is needed in order to give a visible shape and form to the soul :

> For, though mind be the heaven, where love doth sit,
> Beauty a convenient type may be to figure it.

This realistic approach to love has a contemporary appeal. The artificiality of Elizabethan Petrarchan poetry leaves us cold.

If Donne is a great poet of love, he has also written a body of **religious poetry which is not without its appeal to the modern sensibility**. The modern man may be sceptical or agnostic but he badly needs spiritual comfort which Donne's poetry cannot fail to provide. The growing isolation of the individual in modern life, the decline in family relationships, the withering of sentiment, the increasing mechanization of life, the mounting tensions and anxieties in today's world—all these make a quest for peace and tranquillity essential for the modern man. And poetry like Donne's is the answer. Donne's defiance of death is inspiring :

One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more ; death, thou shalt die.

Donne teaches us to repent of our sins even as he himself seeks God's help in achieving repentance :

Teach me how to repent ; for that's as good
As if Thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with Thy blood.

In the "Holy Sonnets" he makes a complete surrender of himself to God and entreats His mercy and grace. His *Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness* cannot fail to move us :

As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.

Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward is another uplifting poem. Addressing Christ the Savour, Donne says :

O think me worth Thine anger, punish me,
Burn off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore Thine image, so much, by Thy grace,
That thou may'st know me.

Donne's divine poems certainly contain an inner struggle or a spiritual conflict. The note of religious ecstasy too is lacking in them. But about the poet's perfect sincerity and his absolutely humility there can be no doubt. Nor can there be any doubt about their efficacy in affording to the reader that serenity of mind and inspiring that faith which the modern man needs so badly in the midst of the turmoil and strife of this world.

The colloquial tone of his poetry is another element in Donne's modernity. Donne revolted against the sugary diction of Elizabethan verse and wrote the "poetry of talk. T.S. Eliot in the 20th century revolted against the poetic diction of his predecessors and he too introduced the colloquial note in his poetry. Donne has been admired in the 20th century for using in his verse the language that men actually used in his time, and for employing the conversational manner in his poems : "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love" ; "T'is true, 'tis day ; what though it be ?" ; 'I'll tell thee (dear love) what thou shalt do" ; "Send home my long stray'd eyes to me"—these opening lines are all conversational in tone. Utterance, movement, and intonation in Donne's verse, says F.R. Leavis, are those of the talking voice. Leavis cites the mastery of tone in *Air and Angels*—the transition from the gravely gallant and conventional exaltation of the opening to the blandly insolent matter-of-factness at the close ; and he says that the subtleties of Donne's use of the speaking voice and the spoken language are inexhaustible. Quoting the passage "I wonder by my troth......" from *The Good-Morrow*, Leavis observes : "The extraordinary force of originality made a potent influence in the 17th century. The same force of originality makes Donne seems to us a contemporary poet, a living poet in the most important sense." T.S. Eliot, even before F.R. Leavis, had commented on Donne in a similar vein. According to Eliot,* Donne's poetry is a concern of the present and the recent past, rather than of the future. The merit of Dryden and Donne, he says, is to have established a natural conversational diction instead of a conventional one. Each effected a revolution in this respect. Donne will remain permanently in a higher place than he has occupied before. For he was a reformer of the English language, of English verse. The minor Elizabethan dramatists sometimes tormented the language; where the content is often quite simple, the expression is perverse. In the verse of Donne the thought is sometimes over-ingenious and perverse, but the language is always pure and simple. At any time Donne ought always to be recognized as one of the few great reformers and preservers of the English tongue.

We think of Donne as a "modern" poet just because he appears to think and feel as we do about the "wearisome condition of humanity"; and we appreciate him the more because he does not sugar his "songs and sonets," as his contemporaries did, with a smooth and superficially pleasurable coating of poetic sweetness. He broke as sharply with a tradition as 20th century poets did with the post-Tennysonian insipidity of the "Georgian Poets". He used verse as a medium for dialectic, for monologue and for psychological analysis. **This intellectual apprehension** and expression of emotion **is surprisingly modern,** though it is often contorted by over-ingenious metaphors and allusions, and sometimes obscured by far-fetched conceits. It is this quality of intellectuality, above all, which narrows the wide differences between Donne's world and our world, and which establishes the points of contact between the two worlds.

There is also a sombre, uneasy, saturnine cast to his genius with which we can sympathize the more readily because **we in our time have experienced what Donne experienced in his**: the breaking-up of the old order of things; the disturbing progress of scientific discovery; the growth of scepticism; apprehension of sudden or violent death; persecution and intolerance. The revelation that the earth was not the centre of the universe was doubtless as profoundly unsettling to the thoughtful men of Donne's generation as the implications of nuclear fission are to us.

Donne's poetry expresses for us our own hopes and fears of an analogous human condition, with all its situations of foreboding and frustration and its occasions for irony and dismay, created by our personal relationships and social responsibilities, by our sense of insecurity in a world in which private and public morality has failed to keep pace with scientific "progress", and by our spiritual misgivings and perplexities in a world whose values are predominantly materialistic.

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* Eliot wrote in the twenties, and Leavis in the thirties, of this century.

Donne has been a fruitful example for the radical transformation which modern poetry has undergone in the attempt to come to terms with contemporary life. The sophisticated mood of scepticism, the inrush of new sensory data and changing ways of life, the perception of beauty in what was thought to be ugly and of ugliness in what was thought to be beautiful, have given us a peculiar close kinship with Donne. For him, as for us, much that was familiar in the old world seemed to be passing, and every ingenuity was needed to cope with the strangeness of new ideas and new instruments. **The courage, the unsparing candour, the stinging satire and the penetrating wit of Donne have appealed to many of our contemporaries** as an apt example. In Donne, as in Webster, there is no sense of calm and unalloyed beauty, as we have in Spenser or Keats. The beauty of the poems is always precarious, poetic, ecstatic, not to be extricated from the other elements in which it is fused. The abiding atmosphere is one of nervous stress, relieved only by a deliberate urbanity of manner. This pervading mood has been congenial to the modern reader, who also has not found it difficult to appreciate Donne's delight in turning anything and everything to a poetic use. Here are two examples of his exuberant way of bringing together and fusing seemingly dissimilar ideas :

The tables groan, as though this feast
Would, as the flood, destroy all fowl and beast

and

(The wind came) "and swelled our sails, where we
So joy'd, as Sara her swelling joy'd to see.

Each of these couplets is impious. Besides neither the flood has anything to do with banquets nor has Sara's pregnancy anything to do with sailing boats. Donne makes the comparisons humorously, almost as asides, but nothing could have more vividly caught the essential feeling of what he is describing. One touch is added in this way, and the whole scene lives. It is the one gift which, perhaps more than any other, we associate specifically with Donne. He was not a profound thinker, but he succeeded in converting his thinking into the sphere of emotion, so that his vastly assorted imagery is perfectly integrated into his poetry.

Q. 5. Bring out, and comment on, the satirical note in Donne's poetry.

Or

What estimate have you formed of Donne as a satirist ?

Ans. Five of Donne's poems bear the title "Satires". In these five poems Donne pillories five universal dilemmas besetting man : the opposing concerns of body and soul, lawyers and the law courts, religion, would-be nobles and their world, and those who subject themselves to the world's greed. The first four move about through the streets or through various inter-related scenes, introducing characters and dramatic situations. The last is more reflective and not really humorous. It opens thus :

> Thou shalt not laugh in this leaf, Muse, nor they
> Whom any pity warms.

The ridicule and humour in Donne's satires lies in exaggeration, puns (some obscene), unusual rhymes or versification, and ambiguity. The ultimate aim is reform through awareness and disgust and pity ; but the satire is not personal or abusive. All the satires are composed in rhyming couplets on the Latin model, and they influenced both Dryden and Pope. By reason of his extreme youth—he composed his satires early in life—he could not be a very profound moralist, and his satires were mainly literary exercises in which, however, his originality and his fantastic bent of mind were already apparent. He desired to restore to the satire the rude versification used by the Romans. A taste for the obscure led him to prefer Persius, who is his favourite model.

Donne's satires are not only wittier than those of his contemporaries, but weightier in their serious criticism of life, and happier in their portrayal of manners and types. In this respect, some of them are an interesting pendant to Jonson's comedies. *Satire I* describes a walk through London with a giddy ape of fashion, who is sketched with a lightness and vivacity wanting in Jonson's more laboured studies of Brisk and his fellows (in *Every Man Out of His Humour*). Satire II opens with a skit on the lawyer turned poet, passes into a sharp onslaught upon the greedy and unprincipled exacter of fines from recusant Catholics, and "purchaser" of men's lands :

> Shortly (as the sea) he'll compass all the land ;
> From Scots to Wight ; from Mount to Dover strand.

This man is a direct descendant of Chaucer's Man of Law, drawn in more angry colours. *Satire III* stands by itself. It is a grave and eloquent plea for the serious pursuit of religious truth, as opposed to capricious or indolent acquiescence, on the one hand, and contemptuous indifference on the other. *Satire IV* is a long and somewhat over-elaborated exposure of the fashions and follies of court-life at the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign. The picture of the bore was doubtless suggested by Horace but, like all Donne's types, was drawn from life, and with the same amplification of detail and satiric point which are to be found in Pope's renderings from Horace. The last of Donne's satires (*Satire V*) deals with the familiar theme of Spenser's laments—the miseries of suitors.

In his satires, Donne paints a detailed, if critical, picture of the London of his time—with the "brisk perfumed pert Courtier," the captain "with forty dead men's pay," the "velvet Justice with a long/Great train of blue coats, twelve or fourteen strong," and the "monstrous, superstitious puritan," the "plump muddy whore," the apprentices, the schoolboys, the elephant, and the performing ape. The scene is filled with noise, and the picture is true. Here is a quality which passed from Chaucer, through Shakespeare and Jonson and Donne, to Defoe and the journalistic, picaresque novel of the 18th century until we meet it again in Dickens and in the characteristic novel and drama of the 20th century.

The satires of Donne have the least share of his poetical interest. But they do display to the full his manly strength and shrewd sense. They are also noticeable in so far as they exhibit much less of that extravagant exaggeration of contemporary vice and folly which makes of their contemporary, Marston's *Scourge of Villainy*, almost an absurd thing. We cannot indeed suppose that Donne's satire was wholly and entirely sincere, but a good deal in it clearly was. Thus his handling of the perennial subjects of satire is far more fresh, serious, and direct than is usual with satirists, and it was no doubt this judicious and direct quality which commended it to Pope. Moreover, these satires contain many fine touches. The Captain in Satire I, "Bright parcel-gilt with forty dead men's pay"; the ingenious evil-doers in Satire II, for "whose sinful sake/Schoolmen new tenements in hell must make"; the charming touch at once so literary and so natural in Satire V, "So controverted lands/Scape, like Angelica, the striver's hands"; —these are only a few of the jewels that might be produced as specimens. (However, it is not in the Satires that we find the true Donne).

If there is one thing more distinctive than another of Donne's best work, it is the closeness with which the verse echoes the sense and soul of the poem. And so it is in the satires. Their abrupt harsh verse reflects the spirit in which they were written. Horace, as much as Persius, is Donne's teacher in satire; and it is Horace he believes himself to be following in adopting a verse in harmony with the unpoetic temper of his verse:

> And this unpolish'd rugged verse I chose,
> As fittest for discourse and nearest prose.

Part of Donne's satiric technique in these poems rests in the prosody, part in the style. Jonson said that Donne deserved to be hanged for not keeping of accent, but in the satires the alteration of metre has such definite and appropriate effect that such alteration seems deliberate. Donne shows a consistent effort to give to his verse the freedom and swiftness of movement to which, when he wrote, even dramatic blank verse had hardly yet attained. He uses all the devices—the main pause in the middle of the line, weak and light endings (he even divides one word between two lines)—by which Shakespeare secured the abrupt, rapid effect of the verse of *Macbeth* and the later plays. What Donne gains by his irregularities is an enhancement of the naturalness afforded by language and idea, plus an unavoidable emphasis on the words and ideas that are important and an ambiguity on occasion which is significant for the context. The style of these satires is low as expected of satiric writing. Their allusions are commonplace and of the human world rather than of the world of knowledge. Their effect is not uplifting and their aims are directed towards ordinary men.

The style of Donne's satires has neither the intentional obscurity of Hall's more ambitious imitations of Juvenal, nor the vague bluster of Marston's onslaughts upon vice. Donne's wit is a succession of disconcerting surprises. His thought is original and profound. His expression, though condensed and harsh, is always precise. His out-of-the way learning, too, which supplies puzzles for modern readers, is used with a pedantic precision, even when fantastically applied.

No discussion of Donne's satirical poetry can be complete without a reference to the "Songs and Sonets". There are a number of poems in this collection, in which Donne mocks at love and women. For instance, in the Song : "Go and catch a falling star" Donne says that it is as impossible to find a woman who is both beautiful and faithful in love as it is to catch a falling star, to get with child a mandrake root, to hear the mermaids singing, or to keep off the stings of jealousy. Even the truest woman, he adds, will be false to at least two or three lovers within a short period of time. The idea of the inconstancy of women is here conveyed in a really witty manner. The poem called ***Woman's Constancy*** deals really with woman's inconstancy, and the title is thus ironical. Oaths made in "reverential fear of Love" may be violated by any woman, says the poet. In *The Indifferent*, Donne ironically says that he can love any woman provided she is not true. Paradoxically, he regards a woman's fidelity in love as a vice. The woman addressed in this poem is asked to take twenty lovers, just as the poet himself would like to have twenty mistresses. In *Break of Day*, Donne ridicules businessmen who indulge in love-making because such lovers cannot devote much time to their love :

He which hath business, and makes love, doth do
Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.

Love's Exchange is a denunciation of love. The poet calls upon Love not to torture him but to kill him outright. In *Love's*- *Alchemy*, he makes fun of love because those, who claim that they have found happiness in love, are impostors like those who boast of having discovered elixir. Why should men sacrifice their ease, their wealth, their honour, and their youth for the sake of this vain bubble, love ? The poem concludes with the following sharp onslaught on women :

Hope not for mind in women ; at their best
Sweetness and wit, they are but Mummy, possess'd.

In *The Flea*, Donne ridicules his beloved for her moral scruples and for her reluctance in surrendering herself to him. He claims that their bodies have already been united in the flea which has sucked a tiny drop of his blood and a tiny drop of her blood. *The Message* is another satire on women. Donne asks his beloved to send back his eyes and his heart to him, even though his eyes have learnt from her "forced passions and false passions," and his heart has been taught by her to treat oaths of love as of no consequence. In *The Apparition*, the poet mocks at his beloved who is hard-hearted towards him but offers herself freely to another man who does not much care for her. In *The Broken Heart*, the poet condemns love because it takes entire possession of our hearts, swallowing us whole, as a pike swallows little fish. Love, says the poet mockingly, "is the tyrant pike, our hearts the fry." The poet's experience of loving this woman has been so disappointing that

My rags of heart can like, wish, and adore,
But after one such love, can love no more.

The Damp is, again, written in a satirical vein. The poet has been killed by his beloved as will be proved by the fact that doctors, on dissecting his body, will find his beloved's picture in his heart. The doctors themselves will drop down dead, struck by the beauty of the poet's beloved as seen in her picture. The poet asks his beloved to kill the "enormous giant," her "Disdain," and the "enchantress, Honour", through which she kills her lovers. The poem closes with an amusing line, when the poet, addressing his beloved, says ; "Naked you have odds enough of any man." *Love's Deity* is a satire on the god of love who has tried to arrogate to himself the powers of Jove. The original function of the god of love was "indulgently to fit actives to passives." But now the god of love urges lovers "to rage, to lust, to write, to commend", and then, changing the line of reasoning, the poet expresses his fear lest his beloved should begin to respond to his love. He does not want that she should love him because, since she has loved others before, she is not a reliable or trustworthy mistress :

Falsehood is worse than hate ; and that must be,
If she whom I love, should love me.

The satirical vein is noticeable in some of the Elegies too. Donne was a man of strong passions in whom an appetite for love was crossed by a deep distaste for it. He is a satirist and elegist at the same period, and even in the same poem. The scorn of the satirist invades the world of amorous elegy ; his gayest poems have a note of bitterness ; his most passionate lyrics are rarely free from a note of contempt. The very first Elegy ("Jealousy") opens thus :

Fond woman, which wouldst have thy husband die,
And yet complain'st of his great jealousy.

And the poet goes on to tell this woman that even if her husband were seriously ill and screaming with pain, she would not weep but feel jolly and frolicsome like a slave who is going to be released from bondage.

Q. 6. Discuss the view that Donne is anti-Petrarchan in his treatment of love.

Or

"Donne's treatment of love is entirely unconventional except when he chooses to dally half-ironically with the conventions of the Petrarchan tradition." Discuss.

Or

It has been said that Donne out-Petrarchs Petrarch. How do you reconcile this view with the generally accepted belief that Donne rebels against the Petrarchan tradition in his love-poetry ?

Ans. When Donne started writing poetry, Petrarchan sonneteering was in full swing. Donne revolted against the whole Petrarchan convention. He rebelled not only against the sugared sonnets in which this convention found expression, but against the whole creed of chivalry and woman-worship. For the sugary language, he substituted a more realistic use of words "such as men do use", and a more dramatic and passionate lyrical verse. As for woman-worship, he looked upon woman as not a goddess but a creature desirable indeed, though not adorable.

Elizabethan love-poetry was full of allusions to the gods and goddesses of mythology. But Donne banishes the goodly train of these deities, just as he refuses to deify or idealize the beloved. In Donne's poetry the place of gods and goddesses is taken by images drawn from all the sciences of the day, from the definitions and distinctions of the Schoolmen, from the travels and speculations of the new age, and from the experiences of everyday life. Maps and sea discoveries, latitude and longitude, the phoenix and the mandrake's root, the scholastic theories of angelic bodies and angelic knowledge, alchemy and astrology, legal contracts and *non-obstantes*, "late school-boys and sour apprentices", "the king's real and his stamped face"—these are the kind of images, erudite, fanciful, and homely which give to Donne's poems a texture so different at first glance from the florid and diffuse Elizabethan poetry.

Instead of adopting an attitude of adoration and worship towards the beloved woman, as the Petrarchans did, Donne adopts a mocking, cynical attitude toward her, and more often than not shows a sensual approach to her. *The Message* satirizes women for their "forced fashions and false passions" and for their lightly violating their "word and oath". *The Broken Heart* is another satire on love :

> Ah, what a trifle is a heart,
> If once into love's hands it came !

Love, says the poet, swallows the lovers and does not even chew them. Love is "the tyrant Pike, our hearts the Fry". In *Love's Deity* the poet again dwells upon the falseness of women.

Such poems show Donne's cynicism. The content and the tone of these poems is in sharp contrast to the Petrarchan tradition as we see it in Spenser's *Amoretti* or Sidney's sonnets to Stella. A cynical and sensual attitude is to be found in some of Donne's

Elegies, for instance in Elegy I ("Jealousy"), Elegy IV ("The Perfume"), and Elegy XIX ("To His Mistress Going to Bed"). There is brutal cynicism in Elegy I, and there is the frankest possible sensuality in Elegy XIX where he wants his beloved to let his hands fondle every part of her body, comparing her body to America waiting to be explored by his hands. He demands complete nakedness from her :

> Full nakedness ! All joys are due to thee.
> As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be,
> To taste whole joys,

No Petrarchan would have written like this because the imagined sanctity of the beloved's body would not have permitted this licence. But there are other strains and moods in the Elegies. There is biting and paradoxical wit in Elegy IV ("The Perfume") and in Elegy XI ("The Bracelet"). There is passionate dignity and strength in Elegy V ("His Picture") :

> My body a sack of bones broken within,
> And powders blew stains scatter'd on my skin.

There is passion that rises superior to sensuality and wit, and takes wing into a more spiritual and ideal atmosphere, in Elegy XII ("His Parting from Her") :

> I will not look upon the quick'ning Sun,
> But straight her beauty to my sense shall run ;
> The air shall note her soft, the fire most pure ;
> Waters suggest her clear, and the earth sure.

As already indicated, Donne, in revolt from the Petrarchan or Elizabethan convention, seems to have cultivated the Roman convention of Ovid, the convention of cynicism and sensuality. There is a gaiety in Donne's poems elaborating the thesis that love is a perpetual flux, fickleness the law of its being. In the Song : "Go and catch a falling star" Donne establishes the thesis of the fickleness of beautiful women. Even if a beautiful woman who is faithful in love were to be found

> Though she were true, when you met her,
> And last, till you write your letter,
>   Yet she
>   Will be
> False, ere I come, to two, or three.

Another poem is ironically called *Woman's Constancy*, its argument being that women's oaths and pledges of love are all false. In *The Indifferent* the poet is willing to make love to any woman provided "she be not true." Constancy in this poem is called a vice, and women are urged to have "twenty" lovers just as men seek a similar number of women to make love to. In *Love's Usury* the poet wants that as long as he is young he should be allowed to love any number of women : "let my body reign." In *The Triple Fool* the poet mocks at himself for loving and for speaking about his love in "whining poetry." In *The Legacy* the beloved is blamed for giving pieces of her heart to a number of lovers. In *Love's Alchemy* the poet refuses to believe that any happiness lies in love, and is opposed to the sacrifice of ease, wealth, youth, etc. for the sake of "this vain bubble's shadow". This poem concludes with a cruel, satirical thrust aimed at women :

> Hope not for mind in women ; at their best
> Sweetness and wit, they are but Mummy, possess'd.

In *The Flea* the poet ridicules his beloved for her moral scruples and for her reluctance to surrender her body to him.

Of the joy of love, the deep contentment of mutual passion, the Petrarchans had little to say (except in some of the finest of Shakespeare's sonnets), but they had much to say of the pains and sorrows of love—the sorrow of absence, the pain of rejection, the incomparable beauty of the lady and her unwavering cruelty. And they said it in a series of constantly recurring images : of rain and wind, of fire and ice, of storm and warfare, comparisons with sun and moon, with earth's and sea's rich gems, with April's first showers ; allusions to Venus and Cupid, Cynthia and Apollo, Diana and Actaeon ; abstractions such as Love and Fortune, Beauty and Disdain ; and so on. But in Donne's love-poetry the finest note is the note of joy, the joy of mutual and contented passion. This joy is as intense as in Burns, though it is of a more spiritual and intellectual quality in Donne. This note of joy is seen in poems like *The Good-Morrow, The Canonization, The Anniversary,* "Sweetest love, I do not go", and *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*. In *The Good-Morrow* the lovers (or, perhaps their eyes) are perfect hemispheres constituting a whole world. In *The Canonization*, the poet is one fly and his beloved another, and they are tapers too ; they are the Eagle and the Dove ; and they will ultimately be worshipped as saints of love. In *The Sun Rising* :

> She's all states, and all princes I;
> Nothing else is.

In *The Anniversary* .

> Here upon earth we're kings, and none but we
> Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be.

But no single generalization can cover all Donne's love poetry. We have described him as anti-Petrarchan but there are certain poems in which Donne adopts the Petrarchan pose. For instance, Donne introduces Venus and Cupid in some of his poems. We meet Venus in *The Indifferent* and Cupid in *Love's Usury* and *Love's Diety*. (However, Donne's references to these deities are sarcastic and disparaging). Love is regarded as a god, lovers the clergy of that god :

> We for Love's clergy only are instruments.
> (*A Valediction : Of the Book*)

Oaths are made in "reverential fear" of that god's "wrath"; and the man who resists the god of love is a "rebel and atheist". Donne can even doubt whether those who admit love after a struggle have not lost the god's grace by their resistance like small towns which stand stiff, "till great shot/Enforce them". Then Donne can sigh, shed tears, and waste himself in his state of disappointment in love. A notable example of this is *Twickenham Garden* where Donne finds himself "blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears" and where, in his sorrow, he wishes that "winter did benight the glory" of the lovely garden which seems to be mocking him to his face. In *A Valediction* : *Of Weeping* he is again shedding profuse tears, and his tears mixed with the beloved's overflow this world. He addresses his beloved as "more than Moon" and asks her "not to draw up seas to drown him in her sphere". The poem ends thus :

> Since Thou and I sigh one another's breath,
> Whoe'er sighs most, is cruellest, and hastes the other's death.

In *A Noctural upon St. Lucy's Day* we again have a flood of tears :

> Oft a flood
> Have we two wept, and so
> Drown'd the whole world, us two.

In *The Damp* we come across Petrarchan personifications : The enormous giant (that is, the beloved's Disdain) and the enchantress (*i.e.*, the beloved's Honour). The lover's "Constancy" and "Secretness" are also personified. The Petrarchan note appears also in *The Blossom, The Primrose*, and *The Relic*.

It has been suggested that the traditional or Petrarchan note appears in poems most of which were intended for ladies of status. In these poems Donne adopts the Petrarchan convention to pay compliments to the noble ladies of his acquaintance. These poems—*Twickenham Garden, A Nocturnal, The Primrose, The Blossom*, and *The Relic* are impassioned poems connected with the Countess of Bedford and Mrs. Magdalen Herbert. But, in any case, it is far from the truth to say that Donne out-Petrarchs Petrarch.

Another aspect of Donne's anti-Petrarchanism is his use of colloquial diction in his love-poems. Petrarch and his followers used florid, highly ornamental and mellifluous language in their love-poetry, but Donne rebelled against this kind of sugary language and replaced it with language "that men do use." We may turn to any of his love-poems (including most of the love-elegies) and we shall find that both the *language* and the *tone* are conversational. The poet-lover seems to be *talking* to his beloved across the table, as it were ; the manner is the same when the poet is addressing the reader ("Go and catch a falling star") or a friend (*The Canonization*). Thus Donne effected a revolution (or a reform) in the use of language in love-poetry. Donne was the first to introduce into lyrical verse those natural speech-rhythms, which require not lines but sentences, paragraphs or stanzas for their completion, that colloquial diction, and that approximation to the language of impassioned colloquial speech which Shakespeare and his fellows introduced into dramatic verse. Here is the colloquial style of Donne :

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we lov'd ? (*The Good-Morrow*)

Busy old fool, unruly Sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us.
(*The Sun Rising*)

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love ;
(*The Canonization*)

Must business thee from hence remove ?
Oh, that's the worst disease of love,......
(*Break of Day*)

Enter these arms, for since thou thought'st it best,
Not to dream, all my dream, let's act the rest.
(*The Dream*)

"In an age when poets were musicians and wrote their lyrics to be sung, Donne used in complete dissociation from music a stanza-form that proclaimed the union of poetry and music. The dissociation is positive ; utterance, movement and intonation are those of the talking voice."

"Something may be said about such mastery of tone as is exhibited, say, in *Air and Angels*—the passage from the gravely gallant and conventional exaltation of the opening to the blandly insolent matter-of-factness of the close. Indeed, the subtleties of Donne's use of the speaking voice and the spoken language are inexhaustible."

"Donne's poetry is the poetry of talk vigorous and direct. His abrupt openings, his vigorous unconventional, unpolished yet felicitous phrasing, his wit, his imagery homely and erudite—all suggest one who is talking. arguing, expostulating, playing with his thoughts, but neither polishing his eloquence nor surrendering himself to the pure delight of song. But his talk is poetry because it is musically drawn out from line to line in surprisingly varied and elaborate stanzas or paragraphs."

Q. 7. Write a critical note on the alleged obscurity of Donne's poetry. Does this poetry repel you on this account ?

Or

Jonson said that Donne, "for not being understood, would perish." How far was this verdict justified ?

Or

Do you think that Donne's poetry can be appreciated only by scholars ? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans. As a poet, Donne is difficult and obscure, and for this reason often irritating. He has been called an Elizabethan Browning. His metrical roughness, his obscurities of method, his bewildering elusiveness, his ardent imagination, and his taste for metaphysics, are characteristics which remind us of the author of *Sordello*, and "Men and Women." Nor is this comparison without foundation in fact, for Browning was an emphatic admirer of Donne's work, and was influenced by him to no small extent.

Donne's faults are so gross and so palpable that they hardly need to be emphasised. But this very peculiarity obscures his beauties. Readers are shocked or bored or irritated or puzzled, by his occasional nastiness, his frequent involution and eccentricity, his not quite rare extravagances which go near to silliness ; and these are the reasons that largely contribute to his obscurity. Readers thus lose the extraordinary beauties which lie beyond or among these parts. The strongly mixed and flawed character of his style is one reason for the obscurity.

During his lifetime, and for a period after his death, Donne was highly esteemed ; indeed few men can ever have inspired a homage more noble or more moving than that paid to Donne by Izaak Walton in his *Life of Dr. John Donne*. By the end of the eighteenth century. however, Donne had passed out of vogue, and it was possible for Hazlitt to say : "Of Donne I know nothing but some beautiful verses to his wife, dissuading her from accompanying him on his travels abroad, and *some quaint riddles in verse, which the Sphinx could not unravel*." The reference to "quaint riddles" is, of course, a pointer to the obscurity of much of Donne's poetry. Sir Walter Scott read Donne's poetry but dismissed it. Indeed, Donne and the other metaphysical poets awakened in Scott a lot of angry hostility. The fluent, narrow plainness of Scott's own verse is in direct contrast to Donne's elaborate and thoughtful style of writing. Scott condemned Donne as "harsh and scholastic, pedantic", spoke of "the unprofitable trade of combining dissimilar and repugnant ideas", and likened Donne's poems to "barbarous, jingling, ill-regulated prose", little different from "the inscription on a tomb-stone." This bitter criticism doubtless represented the view of many of Scott's contemporaries. But voices were not wanting to defend Donne's poetry. Thomas de Quincey said that Donne combined "what no other man has ever done, the last sublimation of dialectical subtlety and addressed with impassioned majesty." In spite of de Quincey, Donne seems to have found little favour in the Victorian era. The twentieth century has, however, witnessed a revival of the vogue of Donne and has done more than justice to him. In the thirties and forties of this century few poets were more keenly appreciated than Donne.

A distinctive feature of Donne's poetry is its particular quality of discussion and argument. He disapproved of the smooth, empty sonneteering of those who automatically and effortlessly followed

Petrarch, and found the easeful stanzas of the majority of his contemporaries often less than honest. There is, in Donne's poetry, a strong intellectual element. The vocabulary he employs is largely very simple and even ordinary, but the thought is often very subtle. The argumentative and analytical quality of many of his poems makes them difficult of comprehension. Of course, the thought or the argument of his poems is always mingled with an intensity of passion; his intellectuality is emotional intellectuality. Indeed, a union of passion and ratiocination is an outstanding charateristic of Donne's poetry. But, if he fused thought and feeling, he did not always maintain the fusion through even a short poem, and lapsed into logical hair-splitting. The way in which some of his poems open shocks the reader into attention, sometimes by means of a question :

Now thou hast lov'd me one whole day,
Tomorrow, when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say ?
Wilt thou then ante-date some new-made vow ?
Or say that now
We are not just those persons which we were ?
(*Woman's Constancy*)

First the shock, then the ingenious development of the thought : this is Donne's characteristic method. But the development of the thought is so ingenious, even in the poem from which the above lines have been quoted, as to baffle the average reader. That there is passion in this poem cannot be doubted, but the passion is pushed into the background, and the argument usurps the position of honour. Indeed, Donne displays a "fiendish ingenuity" in the manner in which he develops an argument or analyses a situation In *A Valediction* : *Of Weeping*, we come across the following lines :

On a round ball
A workman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All
So doth each tear,
Which thee doth wear,
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

What can the average reader make of these lines ? The argument is involved, and the meaning is not clear. What the poet seems to be saying is this : "A cartographer can depict the whole world—Europe, Africa, Asia—on a round map or globe and thus convert the globe into something significant and momentous ; in the same way every tear of the beloved is significant and momentous like the globe which represents this earth. Her tears, falling like rain from heaven, mix with the poet's tears and overflow the world." These lines have a profundity of thought and feeling, but to convey what he has in mind Donne needs all his philosophy, all his knowledge of science and natural history, and geography. We have also here an example of Donne's tendency to put together dissimilar images —the continents of the world here seem to jostle the tears of the beloved. And the poet goes on to employ another of those figures of speech which are known as conceits :

O more than Moon,
Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere,
Weep me not dead in thine arms,......

The metaphysical arguments and conceits in Donne's poetry are obscure to many readers. Conceits were quite common in Petrarchan poetry of the Elizabethan age, and conceits can be a source of much pleasure. But many of Donne's conceits are too far-fetched to carry conviction, and some of them are not clear at all. In *The Good Morrow*, we come across the following lines :

Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp North, without declining West ?

These are beautiful lines with much suggestion in them, but the meaning is not easily understood by the average reader. And, in any case, the comparison of the lovers* with hemispheres is far-fetched. In *A Valediction*: *Forbidding Mourning*, the two lovers are compared to a pair of compasses. How many readers can understand the implications of this comparison without the help of an annotator ? Sometimes the conceits are so odd that we lose sight of the thing to be illustrated, in the startling nature of the illustration. With Donne love is a spider which, dropped into the wine of life, turns it to poison (*Twickenham Garden*).

Or love is a cannon-ball : "By him, as by chain'd shot, whole ranks do die" (*The Broken Heart*). Or love is a devouring fish : "He is the tyrant Pike, our hearts the Fry." (*The Broken Heart*). This fashion of "conceitful writing", is one very substantial ingredient leading to obscurity in Donne's poetry.

Sometimes a poem by Donne becomes obscure because of its abstract, spiritual quality. *Air and Angels* is one such poem. Here not only is the argument highly intellectualised and subtle, but the very theme is abstract and therefore difficult to comprehend. The poet here compares his beloved to an angel because her loveliness is as vague as that of an angel. And he then goes on with his thesis till he proves that a man's love is purer than a woman's just as an angel is purer than air. But it is not possible for us to understand the ideas without help. Critics like A.J. Smith, Helen Gardner, and William Empson may be able to understand what Donne is here really saying, but not readers like ourselves. Even James Reeves pleads his inability to have understood the meaning completely. Another poem of the same kind is *The Ecstasy* in which we are to visualise the souls of lovers as having come out of their bodies in order to go back to them after negotiating with each other and realising that "bodies" are, after all, absolutely essential even for what may be called "spiritual" love.

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*The lovers are compared to hemispheres. According to another interpretation, it is the eyes of the lovers, not the lovers themselves, that are mcopared to hemispheres.

Song of the obscurity in Donne's poetry is due to its unfamiliar allusions. Donne ransacks all sciences and all learning in order to find images and comparisons which precisely answer his purpose. An example of this allusiveness may be found in *A Valediction : Of the Book* where we must have some knowledge of the lives of ancient classical poets (Pindar, Lucan, Homer), some knowledge of theology (religious schisms, etc.), some knowledge of history (Vandals and Goths), sciences, astrology, and the music of the spheres, besides some geographical terms (latitude, longitude, etc.) in order to be able to appreciate or even to understand the poem. In *The Will* there are references to Jesuists, Capuchins, Schismatics, Schoolmen, etc. We must know something of medicine in order to understand Donne's verse-letter to the Countess of Bedford. Then we must have some knowledge of logic and philosophy and metaphysics. A poem by Danne is often an argument in which a mind trained in analogy, in seeing one thing in terms of another, exploits a chosen situation with a new and elaborate set of inter-connected images. Donne enormously widened the range of the lyric, satire, elegy, and meditation. His poems are a peculiar blend of medieval learning and Renaissance charm. His philosophic ideas are largely traditional—Platonic, Scholastic, Jesuit—but the attitudes to those ideas hardly exist outside those poems. Johnson was exaggerating an essential truth when he said : "The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour."

Finally, Donne's manner of writing (combination of words and phrases, syntax, etc.) is such as to puzzle the reader who does not easily find the links in the construction of sentences. *Love's Alchemy* ends with the following couplet :

> Hope not for mind in women ; at their best.
> Sweetness and wit, they are but Mummy, possess'd.

No one will follow the sense here unless he is told that the word "possessed" should first be linked with women before the words "they are but Mummy" can yield their meaning. The sense may thus be expressed : "At their best women are sweetness and wit, but once they become the possession of their lovers (through marriage) they become "mummies" (that is, lifeless and devoid of vitality or high spirits or vivacity). In *The Funeral* the following lines are sure to perplex the reader :

> For if the sinewy thread my brain lets fall
> Through every part

Can tie those parts, and make me one of all,
Those hairs which upward grew, and strength and art
Have from a better brain
Can better do't.

The "sinewy thread my brain lets fall" refers to the poet's soul. But what subtlety ? The "hairs which upward grew" are the hair on the beloved's head. "A better brain" means the beloved's *head* (not the brain) which is superior to the poet's head. In *A Valediction : Of my Name* the last line of the first stanza is : "The diamonds of either rock". Here who but James Reeves or Grierson Smith or A.J. Smith will tell us that "of either rock" means "of the west (South America) or the east (India) ? Examples of this kind of obscurity may, of course, be multiplied.

Donne's religious poems reached astounding heights of subtlety and intensity. The searching of soul and the horrified fascination with which Donne contemplated the process of dissolution and the awful event of death are rendered with amazing intellectual ingenuity and imaginative power. In the best of these poems the paradoxes of art reflect with anguished intensity the paradoxes involved in man's relation with God. Here Donne probes with fierce anxiety for the right relationship with eternity. These poems are not easy of comprehension. In *Good Friday Riding Westward*, the ingenuity of the thought is striking. The main point here is that the poet is going west but that his thoughts turn east where Christ was crucified. Few readers can follow this line of thought without help from a scholar.

There is thus much substance in the assertion that Donne's poetry appeals chiefly to scholars. The ordinary reader is repelled by this poetry. "To many whose beliefs are of a simpler kind, whose doubts do not approach in subtlety to those of Donne, whose experience is less tempestuous and less passionately vivid, there is something in the feverish agility of these poems," says a critic about Donne's religious poetry. Donne's secular poetry too repels the ordinary reader who is not interested in solving riddles in poetry. But readers who wish to be intellectually stimulated and who are not averse to some strenuous mental effort will find Donne's poetry delightful and exciting and provocative. "To the unsophisticated, to the conventional and the slow-witted, to the sheltered simplicity of the unquestioning mind, he seems harsh and obscure and repellent. To those, however, whose minds have been quickened by despair and doubt, whose worldly experience is as passionately vivid as tantalising, and who above all can value the finer clarifications of a superb wit, Donne will always be one of the rarest treasures of English literature."

Q. 8. Bring out the dramatic quality of Donne's poetry.

Or

What evidence do Donne's poems afford of the dramatic quality of his genuis ?

Or

Discuss the view that almost all Donne's poems are dramatic monologues uttered in a mood of passionate apprehension.

Ans. The dramatic quality of Donne's genius is evident, firstly, in the form in which most of his poems are written. The bulk of his "Songs and Sonets" and his Elegies take the form of dramatic monologues. A dramatic monologue is a poem in which a character speaks to another who remains silent. The silent character's reactions to the speaker's words are, however, conveyed to us by the manner in which the speaker continues his speech. The words of the silent character are not written down, but we are enabled to guess how he acts and what he would say if he were allowed to speak. In *Break of Day*, the thoughts of the lover are conveyed to us by the words of the speaker who, in this poem, is the beloved. The very opening lines tell us what the lover, who is silent in the poem, has said to his beloved. This is how the beloved opens her speech :

> 'Tis true, 'tis day ; what though it be ?
> O wilt thou therefore rise from me ?

Occasionally, the speaker may reproduce the words which the silent listener is supposed to have said. This happens in *The Blossom* where the poet is holding a kind of dialogue with his heart. After the lover has spoken to his heart in the second stanza, he thus gives us the reaction of the heart in the third stanza :

> But thou which lov'st to be
> Subtle to plague thyself, wilt say,
> Alas, if you must go, what's that to me ?

The heart in the rest of the stanza tells the lover to go to friends in whose company he finds happiness or joy, but that it (that is, the heart) will not accompany the lover. (It is the lover's own heart which refuses to accompany the lover back to the city of London. This kind of thing is, however, possible only in metaphysical poetry). Donne's technique of writing dramatic monologues links him with Browning.

The word "dramatic" generally means something which stirs us by its suddenness or abruptness, something which startles or shocks us, something which awakens us from our mood of lethargy or passivity. The opening lines of some of the poems of Donne are very dramatic, as they are abrupt and startling. Here are some examples :

> I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
> Did, till we lov'd ?
> (*The Good-Morrow*)

Busy old fool, unruly Sun
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us ?
(*The Sun Rising*)

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love.
(*The Canonization*)

I am two fools I know,
For loving, and for saying so
In whining poetry. (*The Triple Fool*)

I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Who died before the god of Love was born. (*Love's Deity*)

Such lines have a dramatic, rather than a lyrical, note.

A dramatic situation always suggests some kind of clash or tension. In the absence of any kind of tension, no situation can produce a dramatic effect. The situations, real or imaginary, in most of the poems of Donne are suggestive of tension or a tug of war (however mild) or a clash of points in view. In *The Sun Rising*, there is a tension between the poet and the newly-risen sun. Although the poem is written in a good-humoured and light-hearted vein, the basic tension is not thereby dissolved. The sun is called upon not to interfere with the lovers but to go and chide "late school-boys and sour prentices." The poem is a challenge thrown at the sun, although the implied clash is resolved in the closing lines where the poet tells the sun that it can perform its functions without any toil by merely shining upon the lovers' bed-room. In *The Blossom*, there is a clash between the points of view of the lover and the lover's heart. The lover wishes to go back to London while his heart wishes to stay on in the country so as to be close to the beloved. The poem closes with a warning by the lover to his heart :

Meet me at London, then,
Twenty days hence, and thou shalt see,
Me fresher, and more fat, by being with men,
Than if I had stayed still with her and thee.

In *The Canonization*, a friend has remonstrated with the lover and urged him not to waste his time in love-making. The lover thereupon feels annoyed and gives arguments in his defence. The whole of the first stanza has a dramatic quality because of the tension that has been generated between the lover and his friend who tried to play the role of an adviser. In *Lovers' Infiniteness*, the tension is produced by the beloved's having failed to give all her love to the poet who, therefore, complains :

If yet I have not all thy love,
Dear, I shll never have it all.

The poet has exhausted his whole store of "sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters." The tension is resolved at the end by the poet's suggestion that the two of them should join their hearts instead of exchanging them, so that they should become one and "one another's All". In *Twickenham Garden*, the tension is again between the poet and his beloved. In this case, the beloved has not responded at all to the poet's love. He is therefore "blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears." This poem becomes more dramatic in the second stanza where the poet expresses a desire to be changed into a mandrake or a stone-fountain. The final stanza is dramatic too, though the poet seems to attain some peace by his conclusion that the whole female sex, with the exception of his beloved, is perverse and untrue. The situation in *The Damp* is very dramatic indeed. The opening stanza startles us by a curious conceit : namely, that the poet's dead body, on being dissected, will be found to contain the beloved's picture in the portion of the heart. The conceit becomes a little more startling when we are told that the doctors dissecting the dead body will be so struck by the beauty of the picture that they too will drop down dead. The tension continues in the second stanza where the poet refers to the beloved's "Disdain" and "Honour" and asks her to show the ruthlessness of a Goth or a Vandal by destroying all records of her victories over men. The tension subsides in the closing lines where the poet offers himself "as a mere man" to be killed by his beloved with her "passive valour."

Elegy I (*Jealousy*) deals with an intensely dramatic situation. The beloved is here urged not to feel sad if her husband is jealous. If the husband were dying, she would not weep but feel merry and frolicsome. So why should she weep now, when she finds him killing himself with jealousy ? The condition in which he is should mean a happy release for her as would his actual death. Elegy IV (*The Perfume*), has a situation that is brilliantly and concentratedly imagined. The atmosphere is one of close excitement and intrigue and the poem has a strong dramatic quality, besides a grim, savage humour. Elegy XII (*His Parting From Her*) is, like the other Elegies, a dramatic monologue. The standpoint here, as in Elegy I, is that of the adulterous lover, but now the lover speaks with a passion and a purpose that increase as the poem moves on :

> Was't not enough, that thou didst hazard us
> To paths in love so dark, so dangerous......

The poet speaks about the lady's lover in a resentful, contemptuous manner, as he does in Elegy I. But the husband here is taken more seriously with his "towering eyes". The poet has here intensified his material. The jealous husband in this poem is not a mere figure of a farce, but a serious element in a situation considerably felt by the poet. The poem is, indeed, very dramatic.

The four poems which share the title "Valediction" are drams of the simplest kind. In one of them at least, and possibly in the others too, the mistress from whom the poet-lover parts is weeping. But the interest centres on the symbol that provides three of the poems with their sub-titles : "Of my Name, in the Window" ;

"Of the Book," "Of Weeping"; and though Donne called the fourth "A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning," it is the poem which we are sure to remember as the one in which the parted lovers are compared to "stiff twin compasses."

Break of Day has been compared, by virtue of its dramatic quality, with the parting scene in Shakespeare's ***Romeo and Juliet.*** The language of this poem is as naked as can be, but its very nakedness speaks passion. The manner of the speaking of the woman is impassioned, and the short panting questions are eagerly gasped out. The man's excuse, though unexpressed, is anticipated by the woman. Similarly, in the last stanza, he is supposed to plead the call of his professional duties, and he is aptly scolded by the woman :

> Oh that's the worst disease of love,
> The poor, the foul, the false, love can
> Admit, but not the busied man.

The Flea and *The Dream* show Donne's dramatic art in its most complex form. Leaving aside its hyperbolical conceits, *The Flea* shows a peculiar kind of cleverness. The scene it describes has the liveliness of the insect that plays here such a prominent part. In this poem, we have three characters instead of two, the third being the flea. And while a painter might represent *The Apparition* in one picture, it would take a set of three pictures to reproduce the attitudes in *The Flea* : (1) The man is pointing to the insect that jumped from him on to the beloved. (2) The woman is hunting the flea, and perhaps has already caught it, but the man tries to dissuade her from putting it to death (3) The woman has disregarded the man's petition and crushed the insect. A vivid contrast of colours is here depicted. The woman seems to have killed the insect less out of revenge than to vindicate the moral law questioned by the man on the strength of what the insect did. But the man does not accept his defeat and undertakes to clear the memory of the insect he has failed to save.

The dramatic quality of Donne's poetry is strengthed by its colloquial tone. In this poetry we hear the speaking voice, and the language used is common and ordinary. Donne rebelled against the florid and decorative diction of Petrarchan poetry. Thus both the language and the tone are conversational, as is the case in much of the drama of modern times. In the Song : "Go and catch a falling star" the poet is addressing the reader, and he seems to be speaking to us across the table. One of the characteristics of this poem is "its absolutely colloquial diction (defiantly colloquial, one feels, here and elswhere), and the subordination, as in the best dramatic verse, of verse-pattern and metrical accent to the giving of maximum emphasis and intensity to a natural speech-rhythm, as of a man talking excitedly." In *Break of Day* the tone is impassioned but colloquial :

Why should we rise, because, 'tis light ?
Did we lie down, because 'twas night ?

In *The Anniversary* the lover is, more than anything else, *talking* to his beloved, though the poem's passion is unmistakable. All the poems which share the title "Valediction" are expressive of an intensity of feeling conveyed through speech-rhythms. *The Dream* is just a bit of talk from the poet to his beloved, though the dramatic effect is undeniable :

Coming and staying show'd thee, thee,
But rising makes me doubt, that now,
Thou art not thou.

Similarly *The Flea*, *The Relic*, *The Blossom*, and *The Broken Heart*—all share the colloquial diction and tone. It is the same with most of the Elegies. They are conversational in tone too, though the language there is not always strictly colloquial. Indeed, Donne was the first to introduce into lyrical poetry qualities characteristic of dramatic verse. The result of his innovation is that the poems in the "Songs and Sonets" have something of the quality of dramatic dialogue or soliloquy.

Almost all Donne's poems, says John Hayward, are dramatic monologues uttered in a mood of passionate apprehension. The passion draws together the words of common speech and attempts sometimes to fuse the incoherent. Donne did not stop to recast or refine. There is no "poetic diction," no use of polish, no compromise with the kind of music associated with Elizabethan lyrics. Donne's rhythms, his vocabulary—at times so add, at times so simple, the twists and perplexities of his syntax, his metaphors and paradoxes, his unpredictable vagaries of thought and feeling—these are Donne's poetry.

[**Note** : Space and time permitting, the student may use the following additional illustration].

The dramatic technique of *The Dream* shows much skill. The scene is a room, which we guess to be only dimly lit. The man is lying, if not in bed, at least on a couch. The woman comes in while he is dreaming of her, and sits by him. Her entrance wakes him and he thanks her for that. The dream was happy, but its theme suits a waking soul better than a sleeping soul. Yet her visit does not interrupt his dream, but is a continuation of it. He seizes the opportunity of paying a highly metaphysical compliment to her. In God, being and intelligence are one ; in the same way

Thou art so true, that thoughts of thee suffice,
To make dreams truths, and fables histories.

But the sensuous lover reappears at once, and he asks her to come into his embrace : "Enter these arms". The first stanza ends on this gesture of the man, one of gentle entreaty, arms out-stretched, a fond smile on his lips and in his eyes. The woman, it seems, remains seated, and out of his reach. So the man tries to lure her forward. He tells her that, at first sight, he had thought her to be an angel but that he soon realised that "she" was "she". While we read this second stanza, we keep on seeing the outstretched arms, and the couch. In the third stanza the woman rises, not to draw nearer but to go away. This movement of the woman makes him doubt whether she is really she. Perhaps she is afraid of her own boldness. Perhaps she feels remorse already for risking her virtue. More likely she is a coquette and likes to play with fire. (Perhaps, we may add, she thinks the man rather tame, and laughs in her sleeve at his too intellectual a method of seduction). The invective against honour here reminds us of that in *The Damp*, but the tone is here more subdued. The lover's morality here has not improved as compared with that in *The Damp*, but the dreamy atmosphere pervades his speech ; his fierceness has left him, at least temporarily ; even the woman's manoeuvre fails to rouse him. Yet, whatever estimate she may form of his softness, we see in it the proof of his genuine attachment. In *The Dream* Donne's dramatic art achieves its most delicate success.

Q. 9. Bring out the quality of wit in the poetry of John Donne.

Or

How would you justify John Donne being described as "the Monarch of Wit" ?

Ans. Coleridge, in his Notes on Donne, wrote : "The wit of Donne, the wit of Butler, the wit of Pope, the wit of Congreve, the wit of Sheridan, how many disparate things are here expressed by one and the same word, wit ! Wonder-exciting vigour, intenseness and peculiarity of thought, using at will the almost boundless stores of a capacious memory, and exercised on subjects where we have no right to expect it—this is the wit of Donne." Coleridge's definition of Donne's wit, it may be pointed out, is too wide and somewhat philosophical. All that Coleridge has tried to convey to us through this observation of his on Donne may be right, but this is not how we in general use the word "wit".

Dr. Johnson, in his observations on the metaphysical poets, had said that these writers did not have a legitimate right to the title of poets "for they cannot be said to have imitated anything ; they neither copied nature nor life ; neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect." Dr. Johnson did, however, use the word "wits" for these poets. But Johnson does not use the word "wit" in the same sense as Pope did. Pope described wit as being "that which has been often thought, but was never before so well expressed." The metaphysical poets, says Johnson, never sought and never attained wit in this sense, for they tried to be singular in their thoughts, and were careless of their diction.

Strictly speaking, says Johnson, wit is that which is at once natural and new, that which though not obvious is upon its first production acknowledged to be just ; to wit of this kind also the metaphysical poets have seldom risen because their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just. Johnson then gives us another meaning of wit. Wit may be regarded as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or a discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, the metaphysical poets have more than enough. Says Johnson: "The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises." This interpretation of wit is also too wide and philosophical, though the first part of this definition does have relevance to what is popularly meant by wit (the first part being that the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together).

Let us, then, turn first to Donne's putting heterogeneous ideas together, or combining dissimilar images, or finding resemblances in things apparently unlike. In *The Good-Morrow,* the poet expresses the idea that he and his beloved constitute one whole world, and he puts it in the following words:

Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp North, without declining West?

In trying to convey the intensity of love between himself and his beloved, the lover compares himself and her to two hemispheres which form the whole earth or globe! And he brings in the "north" and the "west" in order to convey the idea of the freezing cold of the North Pole and the idea of decline indicated by the sun setting in the west. This is an example of what Johnson calls a discovery of strange resemblances in things apparently unlike. In one of his songs, the poet wishes to tell us that it is impossible to find a woman who is both beautiful and true. In this context the other things that he mentions are a falling star, a mandrake root, the Devil's cleft feet, and the mermaids. Here is another example of a combination of dissimilar images or the yoking together of heterogeneous ideas. In *Twickenham Garden* the poet's love is equated with a spider, and his jealousy is equated with the serpent of Paradise. In *A Valediction: Of the Book,* the love-letters of the poet and his beloved become a source of knowledge and learning for priests, for lawyers, and for statesmen, and the poet goes on to mention latitudes and longitudes and eclipses in that context. Here we find an odd assortment of images which otherwise have not the remotest connection with one another. In *The Broken Heart*, we have another surprising example of the same thing. The poet here tells us that love devours human beings without chewing them, and that he is the "pike" while our hearts are the "fry" which the pike devours:

He swallows us, and never chews:
By him, as by chain'd shot, whole ranks do die,
He is the tyrant Pike, our hearts the Fry.

In *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, occurs that notorious comparison of the parted lovers with a pair of compasses. Speaking of the two souls of the lover and the beloved, the poet says :

> If they be two, they are two so
> As stiff twin compasses are two,
> Thy soul the fix'd foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if th' other do.

There is no earthly connection between lovers and compasses, and it is somewhat bewildering for us to find a connection being established by Donne. Here is violence, indeed.

"Wit" as popularly understood means an intellectual capacity by which a man makes amusing remarks or says things which make others laugh. In this sense wit is associated with humour. But what distinguishes wit from humour is its intellectual quality. In this sense, too, we have an abundance of wit in Donne's poetry, and we have a wide range of it. Donne's poems contain ironical wit, satirical wit, paradoxical wit, and so on. This wit is found in the "Songs and Sonets," in the Elegies, and in the Satires. Indeed, Donne's wit is all-pervasive (except in his divine poems which are serious and solemn).

Exaggeration is one of the commonest ingredients of wit. Donne's use of exaggeration to write a witty poem may be illustrated with reference to *The Flea.* In this poem the very triviality of the subject makes the triumph of Donne's wit seem so astonishing. He has here "performed a kind of miracle, made a fire without sticks, built a house without bricks, created something out of nothing, or next to nothing." This poem is generally admired not for any self-expression, or self-revelation, or sincerity. It is admired for its sheer wit, for the astonishing fact that Donne has written twentyseven lines of witty argument on as unpromising a subject as a flea-bite, and drawn from it such an ingenious simile as that about the flea, in which the lovers' bloods are mingled, being their marriage-bed and marriage-temple. If the beloved kills the flea, she will be committing murder, suicide, and sacrilege. The whole poem is, in fact, a rollicking jest, but its wit is brilliant.

The Flea thus develops a conceit which is essentially witty. We come across witty conceits in other poems, too. For instance, in *The Sun Rising*, the poet wittily says that he can eclipse and cloud the beams of the sun with a wink, and that the brightness of his beloved's eyes must already have blinded the sun. He also says that in the person of his beloved both the West and the East Indies ("the Indias of spice and mine") are to be found together and that all those kings whom the sun witnessed yesterday lie now by the poet's side in his bed (in the shape of his beloved). The poem closes with a witty conceit when he says that the sun can warm the whole world simply by warming the lovers' bed-room which is the microcosm of the world. In *The Canonization* also we have some conceits showing Donne's wit. The poet here calls himself one, and his beloved another, fly. They are tapers too and at their own cost die. In them are to be found both the Eagle and the Dove, and they offer a solution of the riddle of the Phoenix : the two lovers being one combine both the sexes in them and are thus like the Phoenix. In *The Anniversary*, the poet regards himself as the king and his beloved as his subject, and simultaneously he regards his beloved as the king and himself as her subject. Nor have these kings any need to feel afraid of treason from either side :

> Here upon earth we're kings, and none but we
> Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be.
> Who is so safe as we ? where none can do
> Treason to us, except one of us two.

In *A Valediction : Of my Name, in the Window*, the poet says that his name engraved on the window-pane lends greater firmness to the glass. In all these cases, exaggeration and hyperbole are the source of wit. *The Curse* is also a witty poem because of its exaggeration.

There are many examples of ironical, satirical and paradoxical wit in the poems of Donne. Ironical and satirical wit are to be found in both the Elegies and the Satires written by Donne. Elegy I opens in a satirical vein :

> Fond woman, which wouldst have thy husband die,
> And yet complain'st of his great jealousy.

In the course of the poem he tells his mistress that they must not make love in her husband's house any longer because there is danger in the husband's jealousy. The whole poem is wittily written. Elegy IV (*The Perfume*) is witty in its references to the girl's hydroptic father, and "the grim eight-foot-high iron-bound serving-man" : and there are other witty remarks throughout the poem. In Elegy XI (*The Bracelet*) the poet mourns the loss of his beloved's gold chain not because of any reason which a lover would normally give but because of the "bitter cost". *Elegy XIV* (*A Tale of a Citizen and His Wife*) too abounds in wit. The poem ends in a sarcastic manner :

> He barely nam'd the street, promis'd the wine,
> But his kind wife gave me the very sign.

Elegy XV (*The Expostulation*)is another witty poem. Here is a bit of mockery of the beloved :

> Is it your beauty's mark, or that of your youth,
> Or your perfection, not to study truth ?

There is a passage in this poem in which the speaker curses the rival who has stolen his beloved's heart. Exaggeration is the keynote of this passage like that of the poem called *The Curse*. In Elegy XVII (*Variety*), the poet defends a diversification of love :

> How happy were our Sires in ancient time,
> Who held plurality of loves no crime !

Elegy XIX (*To His Mistress Going to Bed*) is witty from the first to the last line. There is sparkling fun in this poem, unless the reader is too puritanical.

In the Satires, Donne shows his capacity for mockery and ridicule. Satire II, for instance, makes fun of poets and lawyers. Satire III mocks at false religions. In this poem, "he is not merely witty, but passionately witty, or wittily passionate." Satire IV mocks the folly and futility of those whom Donne had seen at the Court. Here is an example of Donne's wit in this Satire. A spruce man approaches a woman who scarcely knows him :

> And unto her protests, protests, protests,
> So much as at Rome would serve to have thrown
> Ten Cardinals into the Inquisition.

Satire V deals with suitors and law-officers. Here the particular evil which Donne satirises serves merely as a topic for the display of his wit.

A number of poems in the "Songs and Sonets" also show Donne's sharp and biting wit. In these poems Donne mocks at women and ridicules love. The ironical and satirical vein is evident in the Song : "Go and catch a falling star," *Woman's Constancy*, and *The Indifferent*, in all of which he makes fun of women for their fickleness. In *Love's Usury*, he seeks an unlimited variety in love ; his demand here is : "Let my body reign". In *The Legacy*, he mocks at his beloved who has given several pieces of her heart to her several lovers. *Love's Alchemy* closes with a sharp, satirical attack on women :

> Hope not for mind in women ; at their best
> Sweetness and wit, they are but Mummy, possess'd.

In *Love's Deity*, he mocks at the god of love for trying to extend his powers beyond his jurisdiction. *The Message* is a satire on the beloved's "forced passions and false passions" and on her habit of never keeping her word or oath. *The Broken Heart* is full of mordant wit. Love is here regarded as the great enemy of man. Love devours the hearts of men without chewing them. Love is "the tyrant Pike, our hearts the Fry." One experience of love is enough for the poet who closes the poem in a bitter tone of mockery :

> My rags of heart can like, wish, and adore,
> But after one such love can love no more.

The Indifferent is an example of paradoxical wit. Here the poet is prepared to make love to any woman provided she is not true :

> I can love her, and her, and you, and you,
> I can love any, so she be not true.

Q. 10. "The images of Donne's poems are usually condemned because they are far-fetched." Would you agree with this view ?

Or

Write a critical note on Donne's imagery.

Ans. Dr. Johnson pointed out that the metaphysical poets combined dissimilar images and discovered occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. The most heterogeneous ideas are, in their poetry, yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions. There is much truth in these observations of Dr. Johnson. The images in most of Donne's poems are certainly far-fetched. These images marked a departure from the conventional, decorative images of Elizabethan love-poets who drew their material chiefly from the mythology of gods and goddesses (Jove, Venns, Cupid, Campaspe, Psyche, Diana, etc.) and from the world of Nature (moonlight, gardens, brooks and streams, valleys, flowers). Donne is not much interested in Nature-imagery, and he eschews the gods and goddesses of mythology except when he is in a Petrarchan mood in some of his poems.

Donne's imagery is mostly erudite and recondite. He makes use of the scientific speculations and inventions of his time in illustrating his themes. He utilizes the fruits of the voyages of exploration and discovery of the Elizabethan Age to give point to his ideas. He draws his images from medieval philosophy, theology, alchemy, mathematics, astrology, astronomy, anatomy, medicine, and the law. The result is that his poetry, already argumentative, acquires a still more intellectual character because of this kind of imagery, and becomes more difficult to the average reader.

In *The Good Morrow*, images like "weaned" and "sucked on country pleasures" are ordinary and simple, but they are followed by the following far-fetched image: "Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den", which takes us centuries back to the long sleep of seven people. Then we have in this poem images of "sea-discoverers" travelling to "new worlds," maps showing "worlds on worlds", and two hemispheres. All these have geographical associations, and readers are somewhat disturbed by this incursion of geography into poetry.

In one of the songs Donne, wishing to emphasize his view that there is no woman in this world, both beautiful and true, gives us images of a falling star, a mandrake root, the Devil's cleft feet, and mermaids. Apart from the mermaids, none of the other images has anything to do with beauty or love. But the poet's ingenuity deserves to be appreciated, not condemned.

The novelty of images in *The Sun Rising* is noteworthy. The sun is here a saucy, pedantic wretch who is called upon to go and scold late school-boys and sour prentices, court huntsmen, and country ants. Hours, days, months are here regarded as the "rags" of time. There is surely nothing poetic in these images. But they seem perfectly appropriate in their context and they provide the amusement which the writer aims at.

In *The Canonization* the poet speaks of himself and his beloved (*i*) as flies and also as tapers ; (ii) as the Eagle and the Dove ; and (*iii*) as the Phoenix combining both sexes. These are, to say the the least, astonishing images. The first two images may have been employed by other poets, but the Phoenix image is surely original and is far-fetched. But why any reader should dislike this comparison, instead of pausing and wondering at it, is not clear.

In *A Fever* we have a number of unconventional images. The poet here mentions a "carcass", a "ghost", "corrupt worms", "wrangling schools", "meteors", "unchangeable firmament"—all in connection with his apprehension that his beloved may die of a fever from which she happens to be suffering. In *Twickenham Garden* we get pictures of "spider love", "the serpent", the "groaning mandrake", the "weeping stone-fountain"—all unusual images but, again, there is hardly anything inapt about them.

A Valediction : ***Of the Book*** is one of those poems in which the incongruity and even perversity of certain images in their particular context irritates us. Here, indeed, Donne goes not only far, but too far. The first stanza brings before us certain unfamiliar pictures of women connected with ancient poets—Pindar, Lucan and Homer. The third stanza is pregnant with far-fetched images :

> When this book is made thus,
> Should again the ravenous
> Vandals and Goths inundate us,
> Learning were safe ; in this our universe,
> Schools might learn Sciences, Spheres, Music, Angels' Verse.

Here is something to irritate us, indeed. That is not all. The poet goes on to speak of spiritual love, physical love, the instruction that lawyers and statesmen need—and he speaks of these in connection with the love-letters which have passed between the lovers and which in book-form can serve as an encyclopaedia that can never die. Imagery of this kind is sure to offend readers with over-refined tastes and sensibilities.

A Valediction : ***Of Weeping*** is a passionate poem, but its imagery too is far-fetched. The lover's tears become precious because they bear the beloved's stamp and are like valuable coins (mintage). The tears are "pregnant of thee" (some image, indeed !). Then comes the image of a cartographer depicting continents on a map or a globe. Each tear of the lover now becomes a globe because it wears (or contains a reflection of) the beloved. And, next, the beloved is a moon which draws up seas to drown the lover in her sphere. Such images, in the context of love, are highly intellectual and perplex the reader who needs to be enlightened about their meaning before he can appreciate them. But once he understands the meaning, he will not condemn the images but be surprised by Donne's fertility of mind and his ingenuity in "yoking together" dissimilar and disconnected things.

In *Love's Alchemy*, we have a reference to a medieval chemist doing researches to discover the Elixir and glorifying some byproduct which is "odoriferous" or "medicinal" This image has been given in order to illustrate the pleasant illusions which a lover harbours in his mind. But what a distance between the idea and the illustration ! A notorious image is that of a flea sucking a little blood from the lover and then from the beloved and thus becoming a marriage-bed and a marriage-temple for the man and his recalcitrant sweet-heart. Only Donne could have thought of such a fantastic notion. In *A Nocturnal* the poet says that, by Love's limbec, he has become the grave of all that's nothing. Absences have made carcasses of the lovers. The lesser sun, says the poet, has "to the Goat run." These images of the limbec, the Goat (a sign of the Zodiac), and carcasses are characteristic of Donne. In *The Broken Heart* we have two very odd images to convey the ruthlessness of love. "By Love, as by chain'd shot, whole ranks do die", and Love "is the tyrant Pike, our hearts the Fry. To convey the torture of unsatisfied love, the poet has employed comparisons which show the gulf between conventional love-poetry and Donne's love-poetry. The poet also speaks in this poem of "my rags of heart" to convey the idea of the withering of his heart after his devastating experience of love. It must, however, be said to Donne's credit that all these images stimulate, awaken and startle us and give us new angles from which to view the experience of love. There is no reason for us to condemn these obviously far-fetched images.

One well-known image in Donne's poetry does, however, have an alarming effect on us. In *A Valediction* : *Forbidding Mourning* occurs an image which has been singled out by several critics for blame. Parted lovers are here compared to a pair of compasses. Here is a far-fetched and ugly comparison. Dr. Johnson is not wrong when he says that it is difficult to say whether this image arises from absurdity or ingenuity, and that Donne here deviates from nature in the pursuit of something new and strange. An improper effect is produced by this image which, in any case, fails to give delight.

In *The Ecstasy* we have a number of images the propriety of which is questionable. The souls of the lovers are compared to two equal armies confronting, and negotiating with, each other. Love which does not find an outlet in physical or sexual experience is like a great Prince languishing in prison. These and other images in this poem have the value of novelty, indeed, but do not provide any delight.

Images in Donne's religious poetry are far-fetched too. In *Good Friday* the soul is compared to a sphere, and this metaphor receives an elaborate treatment. Planetary motions are brought into the poem and geographical terms such as "zenith" "antipodes", the "Poles". In the *Hymn to God, my God* the poet introduces images of "cosmographers", "maps", a "South-West discovery", "straits", "Pacific Sea", etc. In other words, the language of exploration has been used to describe a spiritual condition. In *A Hymn to Christ*, we have several images of a sensual kind to convey the spiritual relation of the poet with Christ. Thus we have such expressions as "amorousness", "Divorce", "Marry those loves to thee"—all used in a metaphysical sense. Elsewhere the poet uses the word "ravish" to convey the idea of God's taking forcible possession of his soul. There is an obvious incongruity in this kind of imagery which, to say the least, jars on our minds even though it has been defended on the ground that even spiritual experience may be related to our daily life.

To sum up, we cannot condemn Donne's imagery just because it is far-fetched. Here and there an image occurs in his poetry which appears out of place. In his religious poems, the imagery of sexual love is certainly to be deplored. But, on the whole, we feel nothing but admiration for the novelty and originality of Donne's imagery, as also for its wide range and variety. It has even been argued that his imagery is a means of "communicating thoughts and exploring experience and achieving a new insight into it." Most of the images cited above are "conceits" which are a marked characteristic of "metaphysical" poetry and these conceits are "instruments of definition in an argument or instruments to persuade". A metaphysical poem has something to say which the conceit explicates or something to urge which the conceit helps to forward.

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৬০ হাজার [illegible] ভোটে জয় পান দেবশ্রী। নরেন্দ্র মোদী সরকারের নারী ও শিশু উন্নয়ন মন্ত্রকের প্রতিমন্ত্রীর দায়িত্ব সামলেছেন দৃঢ়তার সঙ্গে।

উন্নয়নের শপথ নিন, পদ্মফুলে ভোট দিন

বিজেপি - কলকাতা দক্ষিণ জেলার পক্ষে প্রকাশিত ও প্রচারিত।